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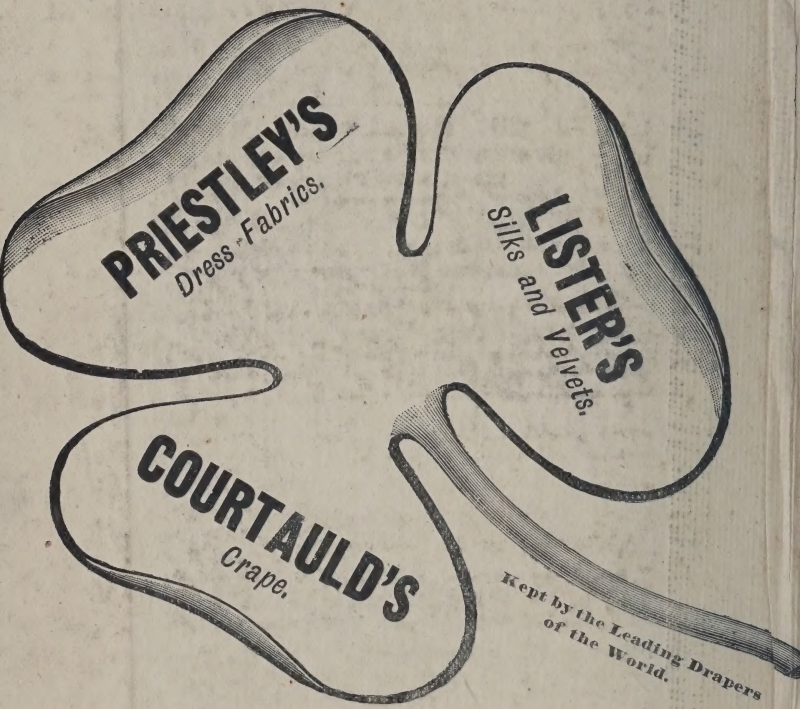

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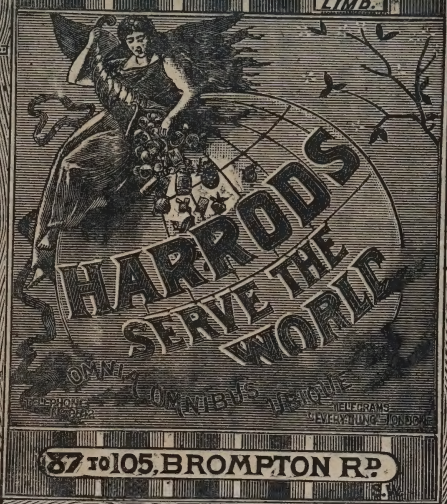


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# A BUSH GIRL'S ROMANCE.

A Novel.

BY

HUME NISBET,

AUTHOR OF

"BAIL UP!" "THE DIVERS," "THE BUSHRANGER'S SWEETHEART," "THE QUEEN'S DESIRE," "THE SAVAGE QUEEN," ETC., ETC.

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# DEDICATION.

TO MY DEAR FRIEND,

PHILIP MENNELL, F.R.G.S.,

AUTHOR OF "THE COMING COLONY," &c., &c.,

I BEG TO INSCRIBE THIS ROMANCE OF

WESTERN AUSTRALIA,

In token of my warm appreciation of his great talents and real goodness of heart, also in commemoration of that brief, but remarkably pleasant trip we had together on board the *Himalaya*, when, with some other matters, we discussed a good deal about "The Coming Colony."

"He *is* a man, take him for all in all."

# PREFACE.

My Dear Mennell,—

How much I am indebted to you, not only for valuable information, the result of your own personal observation, but also for the books and notes, &c., which you lent me, on Western Australia, to help me with the data of my present romance, words fail to express; therefore, I do the only thing that is left to me, failing words, and that is to dedicate my book to you, as a slight return for the benefit I have derived from your most valuable, compact, and reliable, as well as beautifully-composed work, "The Coming Colony," and also for the great comfort which your constant, kind, and appreciative friendship has been to me for the past years of my busy life.

In this vast Sahara, London, even the most loving of friends cannot often meet; now and then our caravans "out-span" together, as on that *Himalaya* trip. Again fate forces us apart; yet I do not think we forget these "out-spannings" while we are driving our cattle in other directions. It may be the converse we have, or the genial atmosphere which surrounds us at such

times that keeps memory green; they comfort, at any rate, many a lonely hour which hard work cannot quite fill up, and prove to us that the links are not broken although stretched out—No, we do not forget.

You know my unshaken faith in Australia, that great "rising child," and how profoundly I share in your belief about the golden future of Western Australia, as "The Coming Colony." We have both looked upon it with our own eyes, and can therefore speak with some authority about its possibilities; we both know the strong and virile people who are produced from this mighty land; we both know their strong points and agree about them, how bank smashes and other kicks behind do not hurt them:—indeed, so young and impulsive are they that these little punishments do them a world of good, for what is a sound kick or a hearty cuff to a stalwart youngster? It may make him smart and rub the place ruefully for a short time, but it must do him a world of good, almost as much good as what Mr. Andrew Lang playfully terms "snow-balling," does to an author.

In the following pages I have tried my best to give a faithful picture of Australia in its western portion. If I have not been all laudation of the people I like and admire so much, it is with the best intention and with a loving purpose that I point out some shortcomings—you will not, perhaps, agree with me, and the "rising children" may howl a bit, but that is nothing. Only

think that my "snow-balls" are very small and soft ones, without a single slate or stone in any of them, as I would not really hurt the "*kids*" for a gold mine.

But—while I can laugh as I pick up and make a fluffy snow-ball to fling at a friend who may be making himself ridiculous by his strutting;—as a lover of the primitive races of mankind I must get out my revolver and shoot straight, and without any attempt at sentiment, at those remorseless wretches who would seek to enslave South Sea Islanders, or "*disperse*" the original Lords of the Australian soil, the Aboriginals.

Trusting, however, in spite of its many imperfections, and perhaps differences from your own opinions, that you may enjoy the reading of this Romance, with its gastronomic Bushranger, Lawless Lover, and daring minx of a Bush girl, and that their adventures may prove of interest to numerous other readers, both throughout Great Britain and the Colonies that I love so well—

Believe me, my dear friend, to be
Yours ever cordially,
THE AUTHOR.

Hogarth Club,
36, Dover Street, Piccadilly, W., 1894.

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# A BUSH GIRL'S ROMANCE.

## CHAPTER I.

### LOST IN THE BUSH—THE RESCUE.

A DREARY arid desert, over which the December sun was slowly setting and which even its effulgent glory only appeared to accentuate and render more desolate.

Some dwarf, scrubby trees and withered-looking bushes were the only upstarting objects which gave variety to this flat plain of grey soil and bleached sand, with, at the north, the termination of dense forests reaching like a tattered purple line across the horizon, and, at the southern extremity, low flat ranges of hills as barren-looking in the distance as the desert which they bound in.

Yet it was a glorious picture of vivid colouring that overarched this monotonous shadow land ; to the eye of an artist it was the correct kind of landscape, for that present effect of sky—a great and unbroken plain, either of earth or sea, alone is required when the sun is going down at its best. An ocean becalmed, or only broken up by faint ripples, when the gold and crimson can be seen quivering amongst the sapphire perhaps is the most perfect to a colourist's sense of proportion, but next to that a flat tableland, with a distant range of hazy mountains and a mirrorlike

sheet of water in the centre becomes all-sufficient to his critical demands: thus he can watch the phantasmagoria without a jar to his pleasure.

All these exacting conditions were fulfilled at this present hour, the sun was going down after the fashion that the great Turner would have loved, a golden ball rapidly getting richer tones as it sank within the fleecy masses of vapour clouds, those semi-transparent films of russet, purple and rose, with the myriad feather flakes above of shining gold and silver, drifting in front of the opal and tender blue miles of atmosphere, all aglow and radiant with the mellow shafts of light thrown up.

The mirror-like pool of water was not wanting either. There it lay about three miles distant, reflecting in more robust harmony the softer blendings of colour about it, a sleeping palette-shaped lake of about two miles long, burning in the centre of that sombre-tinted plain.

In the sky a vulture floated lazily, as if waiting on its coming supper, the one spot of darkness wanted to intensify the glowing of the livid gold, and on the plain a human figure staggered along, the one object wanted to intensify the vastness and awesomeness of that solitude.

It was the figure of a young man of about twenty-two, clad in a digger's or tramp's scant costume, with the swag of a digger or tramp slung over his back, a battered grey felt hat drawn over his brows, a flannel shirt, which had once been red, open at the throat, duck trousers much bepatched and ragged and held up by a narrow leather strap, boots with the uppers gaping and the soles almost worn off, and a soiled

blanket rolled lengthways and seemingly almost empty, it was so attenuated in its bulk.

His face originally had been good-looking and of the Saxon type, with regular enough features, blue eyes, yellow beard and moustache and hair of a light brown.

But the skin was caked with dust and dirt, and baked to a brick-red with the fierce suns he had passed under; the blue eyes glared from bloodshot settings, and the moustache, beard and hair, which fell in tangled curly masses over his shoulders, were dry and drab-coloured.

He had been a stalwart and tall fellow, but the flesh had fallen away from him and his parched skin clung tightly to his lanky frame, so that he looked more like a scarecrow than a living man as he dragged himself along with slow and unsteady steps, yet with a famished expression of eagerness, towards that yet distant glowing lake, for he was starving and burnt up with consuming thirst.

The vulture above kept close to him, as if it knew what would be the end of that weary and hopeless journey—the young man was the coming feast it was waiting so patiently upon.

"Ten days since I last tasted anything except gum leaves," he muttered huskily. "Five days since I had my last taste of water, and on my back I carry a thousand pounds in nuggets. God! will this loneliness never end? Is there no one except myself in this cursed land?"

He stumbled and fell on his face as he spoke, and lay there so long without moving that the vulture thinking the hour had come, made a swoop down-

wards—then, as suddenly, darted up again, for the young man had raised his head.

"Water ahead! I must reach that waterhole, and then I may be able to go on, for I must be near some habitation. Over these hills there must be humanity —there must be—there must be!"

He made an effort, got up on his feet, and took a futile run for a few yards; then he fell again, while the vulture once more drew near, but cautiously this time.

"No, I must not hurry, or I'll never reach that waterhole. If I could only forget it for awhile, for it is maddening to see it gleaming so far away! I'll try."

Again he rose and fixed his bloodshot eyes upon the now crimson sun, while he staggered onwards, covering yard after yard wearily, yet getting gradually near to his destination.

He watched the sun sinking and growing dusky as it dropped; his head turned westward, and his tottering limbs taking him south, watched the change of colour with eyes which took little heed of the glory, yet with a dreamy sense upon him as if he were floating instead of walking. Resolutely he kept his eyes from sinking to the level of that pool, so that when the sun had nearly touched the horizon he raised his head to a fantastic shaped cloud now resting above, and looked at it with a vague kind of wonder as it changed its tints from gold to orange, and then to red flame, finally to become salmon-tinted, and soft against the mellow green.

Onwards, wearily and unsteadily as the gorgeous shades disappeared above, and the clear white lustre of the Australian afterglow stole over the sky; he

must be close to that delicious waterhole now. Can he afford to look?

Yes, its nearest margin isn't a quarter of a mile distant, and it lies like a pool of cool pale green. At the sight all his strength comes back with a flash, and squaring his shoulders and elbows he starts forward like a runner at the last spurt; while the vulture takes another circling sweep higher, as if almost despairing at such unexpected energy.

He has reached it at length, and with a harsh cry flings himself on the moist margin, and, plunging his hands and arms into the mud, reaches down his head to drink.

"God of heaven! it is salt!"

With that despairing scream torn from his bursting heart, the young man leaps up, as if he had been shot, and, falling backwards on the hard clay soil with outspread arms, he lies motionless, like one crucified, with gaping mouth and eyes staring blindly at the deep blue zenith.

The watchful vulture does not know what to make of all this; it is terrified at the glare of these despairing eyes. This inhuman expression of mortal agony is not death, although it is something like and may be the prelude, yet it must wait until the blue glare becomes dim, and the quivering limbs perfectly still; so it circles round and round its intended victim, but without coming nearer.

What has startled this bird of evil omen now, and sent it off like an arrow to the north? Not the victim, for he has not moved, and the vulture has waited and watched too long to leave it so suddenly without good cause.

More of humanity on this desolate plain, that is what has startled the vulture.

Three horsemen are riding at a swinging gallop from the east to the west, and coming in the direct track of the motionless figure as it lies under that grayling sky.

They are splendidly mounted these three horsemen, and seem well enough dressed also—two of them in serge suits, and the third, who appears to be the leader, in a fashionable suit of grey. They are skirting the sides of the salt lake, and ride along quickly as if eager to get to their journey's end.

"Hallo! what the mischief lies there?" exclaims the leader with an oath, as his horse stops suddenly and nearly pitches him.

"Some poor devil kicked out!" answers one of the others as he stoops over his horse's neck and looks at the figure on the ground.

"Dash it all; why couldn't the beggar die some where else, instead of lying there and startling Sally? Come on, lads."

This from the fashionably-attired leader as he urges up his horse.

"Hold hard, Captain!" cried the other, who had spoken first; "he may not be done for."

"What's that to us, Hickey? he'll be dead enough before we come back. Get along, Sally."

"Hold a bit, Captain, he looks like a digger out on the prospecting lay. He perhaps has some nuggets in that swag of his; let's have a look."

"Right, Hickey; it won't take a minute to see. Turn the carcase over and find out, while I light one of the late Honourable Percy Shafton's first-rate cigars."

As Hickey dismounted, the leader took from the

breast pocket of his coat a chased silver cigar case, and from his vest pocket a match box of the same material. The first vesta went out after a momentary flash, which revealed a dark yet handsome face decorated with a heavy and carefully cared-for moustache and gleaming jet-black eyes.

"Curse the night breeze! I'll have to dismount to light up."

Meanwhile Hickey had loosened the swag with deft fingers, and drawn it from under the insensible man, whom he still left on his back, so that by the time the cigar was aglow the task was done, and the bag containing the nuggets was in his hands.

"There is something solid here, Captain. Give us another light till I see what it is."

The other horseman had also leapt to the ground and stood close to Hickey, whom he watched as he undid the fastenings of the bag in the semi-darkness with that natural and undisguised suspicion with which thieves ever regard each other when it is a case of handling loot.

"Fair play's a jewel, Hickey Black! so keep your hand out of that yer bag until the Captain strikes another match."

"Are ye goin' blind, Rory Murdoch?" retorted Hickey with a fine air of indignation. "Can't yer see that my hand ain't near the mouth of the bag, which most likely hain't got nothing but stones?"

"Stones be hanged!" cried the Captain rudely, as he settled the question by diving his own hand in and bringing out one of the nuggets. "It doesn't need a light to tell what this is," he said, as he rubbed it between his fore-finger and thumb; "soft and greasy—it's virgin gold."

"Hurrah!" shouted both men joyfully.

"Don't be such cursed asses! Close round him while I light my bull's-eye, and then we can reckon up the amount."

The figure at their feet never stirred all the time they were discussing these matters; and now as the three knelt together to keep the night air from extinguishing the third vesta, Rory Murdoch chanced to touch the insensible man with his hand.

"Hallo, this chap ain't no more dead than I am, Captain Wild."

"Dash it! can't you remember that I am the Honourable Percy Shafton?" cried the Captain fiercely.

"I forgot for the moment; but all the same he ain't gone, and, what's more, he's coming round."

"Let's see."

The lamp was now lighted, and as he spoke the leader turned it towards the upturned face, gave one quick look, and then started back.

"By George, boys! but who is that cove like?"

"The stiff 'un as we covered yesterday, boss," cried both men after a steady stare; "as like as one pea to another if his beard was a bit neater, and his hair a bit shorter, and the dirt washed off his jaws—like your namesake, Captain, the Honourable Percy Shafton, as we settled for and stowed away."

"That's enough, lads, to alter our plans. I'm Captain Derrick Wild, still, and he'll be the Honourable Percy Shafton. We'll save his precious life, and make him grateful enough to do anything for us. Meantime, honest Hickey Black, I'll take charge of that bag of nuggets which you're fumbling about so

absent-mindedly; those fingers of yours are too sticky for nugget-testing in the dark, my boy."

"D'ye think he'll jine us, Captain?" asked Hickey doubtfully, as he very unwillingly handed the bag over to his chief, who, after tying it up securely, attached it to the saddle of his own mare.

"What do you think?" retorted the leader mockingly. "Did you ever see me fail yet in winning over either man or woman when I exerted myself to win them?"

"Only the judge and jury, Captain, could resist your friendly ways."

"Oh, they were prejudiced persons," answered the Captain with a laugh. "This chap is young, and will owe me his life, for I mean to nurse him like the most loving woman; and I'm no judge of faces if I don't make him like my dog before he is strong. Hold up his head while I give him a sup of weak grog."

Pouring out a small quantity of brandy from his pocket-flask, Derrick Wild diluted it largely with the water they carried, and while Hickey held up the stranger's head in the right position he wet the lips first, and then, wedging open the clenched teeth with the handle of his pocket-knife, he allowed a few drops to trickle down the dry throat.

A pause, and then he repeated the experiment, while his companions watched him stolidly.

"There, he'll be conscious in a moment."

With a rattling gasp and a convulsive shiver the fair-haired young man woke up.

"Water, water!" he muttered huskily, and again the cup was held to his mouth.

'Ah! Where am I?"

"With good friends, my boy," answered this modern Samaritan gently.

"Food! I have starved for weeks!"

"Not yet, my lad. Have another drink first, and then I'll take you to where you can eat with safety."

"Yes, yes—drink!"

For the third time he drank, this time draining the flask; and then, with a sigh of ineffable content, he dropped his head on his breast and closed his eyes.

"Who are you, my lad?" asked the Captain softly.

"James Danton, and an escaped convict. Take me back if you like; for I am wearied of my life," murmured the young man drowsily.

"I heard of that escape from Sam Belger," observed Rory Murdoch reflectively. "He cut his stick ten months since, and was thought to be dead long ago."

"Then he is our man; for Squatter Craven may have a photo of his expected visitor. Let's get back to camp."

Lifting the young man tenderly, Derrick Wild laid him across the withers of his blood mare, and then, springing lightly up behind, he held him steady while he turned back in the direction from which they had come. In another moment, they were away under the starry sky, with the salt lake lying like ink behind them.

---

## CHAPTER II.

### THE HONOURABLE PERCY SHAFTON.

HELEN CRAVEN was a bush-trained girl in the best sense in which the term could be used—healthy in her constitution and wholesome in her mind. Never having read any of the so-called realistic or morbidly

psychical rubbish with which some of the young authors expend their mental energies and debauch their unsophisticated readers in this latter end of the nineteenth century, she had therefore no idea about the wickedness of the world or the depravity of the human soul in its natural state, but thought her little Western Australian portion of the world a very nice place indeed, where any young girl might enjoy herself and be merry and free without needing to dread the consequences.

Ibsen, I dare say, had been born then and had commenced his miserable mission, since he is now a hoary-headed hater of mankind; and the date of my romance is not so many years ago, so that his coming disciples were still in long clothes, therefore absurdly unconscious of such sublimities as "cults," being satisfied then with their milk uncurdled. Zola also was still in embryo—in fact, during those primitive days, particularly in this primitive portion of the Bush, pessimism was as little known as cigarettes and indigestion; therefore the inhabitants, if deplorably ignorant, were not unhappy.

That is, the working and free portion of the community. Many of the convicts, when assigned to good masters, might have been a deal more miserable in the old country during their fugitive moments of liberty than they were working out their tickets here. The aboriginal owners of the land, except during the *dispersing* seasons, were about as happy as the kangaroos before a grand hunt.

The warm sun shone generally throughout the greater portion of the year. Springtime was delicious with its flowers and bush heaths; the fruits in their

season seldom disappointed; the sheep and cattle generally throve and multiplied; and only the Wurley * caused any discomfort, or an occasional bush-fire made them apprehensive—that is, if we except those human, or rather inhuman, beasts of prey, escaped convicts, plying the uncertain occupation of bushranging.

Helen Craven was an exceptionally favoured young person. Her father was wealthy and well born, and her mother was also a lady. As I have said, she was healthy, therefore nearly always happy, and at the age when life spreads out its fairest prospects—namely, eighteen.

Not too tall and not too stout, not too plump and not too thin, she was that fine, well-rounded medium which sensible young men who are not given to brooding philosophy or morbid cultism, ought properly to admire.

Dark, with richly-toned complexion, rosy cheeks and lips, white teeth, and amber-brown eyes which could sparkle with pleasure or merriment like sun-laved, sand-bottomed, clear but not shallow streams, or melt and grow velvety with tenderness under their dark lashes and heavy lids. A face oval, with arching, well-defined brows, and small, rounded forehead over which clustered masses of golden-brown curls; a pointed chin, small yet rounded; a well-shaped nose, with ears to match, and a mouth with the upper lip a perfect Cupid's bow, and the lower lip moist and full; her hands were small and tapering, and her feet small and full in the instep.

It did not take much to provoke a laugh on Helen's lips, and when she did laugh it spread rapidly over

* Hot wind.

her face, lighting up her large and expressive eyes, and exhibiting the double row of pearls in a very infectious fashion.

She had read all the novels in her father's limited library—Scott, Thackeray and Dickens, and one or two of George Eliot's and Charlotte Brontë's.

Walter Scott was a little heavy for her with his introductions, while his heroines were just a trifle shadeless and uninteresting; but his heroes were all right, and his action, when once he gave way, thrilling. Thackeray she somehow learned to hate personally, and consider a bit of a fraud, with his grinning skeletons. She wanted to hear Becky Sharp speak some of her smart sayings, which were always suppressed in the book, before she could quite believe in her witchery; but Colonel Newcome and Esmond were delicious. Charles Dickens, however, was her hero, and while she read Scott once, and some parts of Thackeray twice over, she was never tired of taking up and reading all that this genial novelist had ever written. Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot—yes, she admired them both, but somehow they didn't grip her as Dickens did.

She was a very plain young lady in expressing her likes and dislikes. She did not like verse at all; she could not fancy any person who really shaped his or her feelings into rhyme or even blank verse; she could not have done so herself at any price, and from her own standard she judged others. She had her own *untried* ideas of what passion was—an incoherent whirlwind which might pour out disjointed words in faulty grammar, but could never pause to organise sentences.

The Hon. Percy Shafton had at last arrived, two days before Christmas, and he was not in the least like the mental picture which she had drawn of him from his letters to her father.

Of course she had seen his portraits; as a distant connection of her mother's, they had about a dozen of him in the album, taken at different periods of his life from early childhood up to manhood, and generally speaking the portraits were fairly like him; that is, the features appeared to be the same—the same nose, eyes, and contour—but the expression of the original was so different from the expression portrayed in the photographs. The original Percy had nothing of the empty superciliousness that the portraits expressed; he did not close his eyes as his likeness did, nor did he perk up his head in that insufferable fashion which had made her almost hate him before he came. Why, also, did he always stick his eye-glass up when he was having his portrait taken, and use it so seldom in real life? Perhaps the photographers made him pose in this ridiculous fashion; some of them are so senseless with their preconceived ideas of how their sitters ought to pose, and the real Percy was so easy and good-natured that anyone could manage him.

His letters also were so different from his general style of conversation. The letters—fortunately they hadn't many of these effusions, and these few were short enough, and seemed penned by a young noodle without one idea beyond his own position in life, his money, or his own selfish tastes, which had not impressed her.

What a change must have come over the real

Percy since he last wrote from England! They only had a hurried note from him on his arrival in Melbourne, saying he was coming up by slow stages, and had hired a colonial servant, so would be with them about Christmas.

Well, he had come, and, prejudiced as she had been against him, he had caused a total revolution in her feelings.

She had expected a London West-End club-bred cub with stiff collars and cuffs and an affected drawl, and she met a well-dressed young fellow without an affectation, except perhaps in his dress and extravagant wardrobe; yet even these he discarded as soon as he was fairly settled down on the station, as he did in a day's time. His manners were perhaps just a little too grave for the aimless life he must have led; but his voice was gentle and low, his manner frank and considerate, and, most wonderful of all, not the slightest trace of a drawl or lisp. What a wonderful charm his blue eyes had also, now that she saw them wide open! An earnest, almost pathetic expression filled them, as if he had known some great sorrow that he could not forget, and craved for sympathy and love.

He had been very ill during his voyage out, he told his host, and indeed the traces were still there in his pale and hollow cheeks, which made him doubly interesting to this rather unsophisticated and romantic bush young lady; he had read so much also of everything and observed so much of life, that without any attempt at showing off he was continually giving her glimpses of the world beyond Australia, with those authors she had only heard about; even the short time he had spent in the colonies had not been with-

out its results, for he knew how the gold was found, a good deal about the convicts at Perth, which he had visited on his way north, and, in fact, he seemed to be able to put her right in whatever she wanted to know.

Helen Craven hadn't met many young men, and the few she had met had in no way impressed her young fancy, so that before a week had gone past she was very much interested in this new chum whom she had despised so much before they had met. He did not play or sing, but he could admire her singing and playing; he had no particular gifts beyond having read and seen a great deal, and was always ready to go with her anywhere she wanted, or agree to what she fancied in the way of entertainment, and evidently liked to be near her, which to this colonial beauty was the best of all recommendations for her favour.

"Fancy me thinking him such a bore, and he after all to turn out such a nice fellow!" she thought after the first three days.

His body-servant, however did not meet her approval, if the master did. James H. Black this servant was called, a smooth-faced man of about thirty-five, with red side-whiskers and the most villainous cast of countenance she had ever seen outside the assigned * servants, but what she objected to more than his appearance was the habit he had of waiting so assiduously upon his master.

He was perpetually hovering near by day and night, and intruding at the most *mal àpropos* moments with some device or other, which transparent prying Percy never seemed to observe; and this was the most aggravating part about the whole business, that

* Convicts assigned by Government as servants to selectors.

her father's guest, so acute on ordinary occasions, never observed this bad habit of his man's, but treated him with the same affability and forbearance that he treated the other servants, even although he had to change the subject of conversation through this constant interruption, which was just beginning to be so engrossing. Miss Helen in her present interested mood wished almost that she could lawfully strangle that officious and omniscient valet.

Of course, she knew perfectly well that both her father and her mother would have liked nothing better than to see the Hon. Percy engaged to her, and now that she saw what a really nice fellow he was she confessed, with a sigh, to herself that she would have liked nothing better herself; his voice was so low and sweet, and those grey-blue eyes so earnest and tender, and he so often came up so nearly to the sentimental point, when that beastly man of his appeared like a black shadow and spoilt it all.

For instance, one night after dinner—it was the last night of the year, too—they had strolled together down the vine avenue towards the pond where the water lilies lay clustered; a lovely night, for the moon was divine as it bathed everything with its silver lustre, as only Australian moons can do.

Her father and mother were in the dining-room, and had seen them go out together, with an indulgent blindness; surely he would take advantage that night of the moonlight and tell her that of which she was positive he felt towards her, for by this time poor Helen had owned the truth to herself. Australian love comes quickly or not at all.

They walked together under the vines and out to

the moonlight as it shone on the reeds by the lake without speaking much, and then, while she sat on the rustic seat waiting, he leaned against the striped bark of a young gum tree, looking out on the landscape and puffing his cigar.

At last he spoke, but not quite as she expected :

"This is a strange country of yours, Miss Craven."

"In what way?"

"It is all so beautiful, so seemingly free and yet so environed. I heard the story of a convict as I came up which interested me wonderfully."

"Yes." said Helen, "what was it? Convicts are such liars."

"I daresay; yet I think this story was true. Shall I tell you it?"

"If you like," answered Helen listlessly, not too greatly interested, and thinking he was wasting valuable time.

"He was a young man who had been convicted for a crime which another man had committed. They were so like each other in appearance that the wrong man was taken up, and the right man hadn't the courage to come forward. The wrong man didn't know about this peculiar resemblance at the time, and considered that the witnesses who swore they had seen him do the dastardly deed were paid to swear falsely—perhaps some of them were—yet afterwards he came to think some had sworn to the best of their knowledge.

"Anyhow, he was sentenced to fifteen years' transportation, and the real criminal got off without even a suspicion. Well, he came to Australia brooding over his wrongs, and because he did not knuckle down to

the rules he was punished for insubordination, until at last in desperation he made his escape to the bush."

"And turned bushranger?"

"No, Miss Craven, he did not think of that; he went into the wilds and tried his best to get overland to some of the other colonies, but as he didn't know the country he suffered terribly from thirst and hunger.

"At last he came to a part where he found gold. It was lying loosely amongst the earth in nuggets of all sizes; he had only to pick them up."

"Then he became rich, of course, and was respected," interrupted Helen, just a little impatiently.

"No, Miss Craven, he gathered as much as he thought he could carry, and then he travelled on to find some settlement or station, and went through greater sufferings than ever. For ten days he starved, and for the last five he had no water to drink, yet he struggled on, and the strangest thing of all was that he passed a station, as this might be, and never knew about it being so near."

"I know, Mr. Shafton, that is so common in the bush; a man may pass within a mile of help and never know it was so near when he is lost."

"That is so, Miss Craven. Well, this convict with his gold, a thousand pounds' worth it was, passed this station starving and dying with thirst, and came to a waterhole, where he thought to get a drink, when lo! it was salt."

"Just like Lake Turro over there."

"Yes, Miss Craven, just like Lake Turro. He gave it up then, after he had tasted that brine, and lost all hope and all consciousness. Then, when he was lying, some one passed and stole his gold and left him to die."

"Poor fellow!" murmured Helen, her dark eyes growing velvety as she pictured up that scene.

"Thank you, Miss Craven; but, as I must tell you, he wasn't allowed to die, for just after the thief or thieves had gone, another party rode up and rescued him."

"That was nice."

"Yes, very nice, only that the party who had saved him were desperate bushrangers."

"Did they treat him badly?"

"No; they treated him like good Christians, and nursed him tenderly back to health; only, now I am coming to the curious part of the story, the real criminal for whom this young man had suffered all this false imprisonment and after misery had come out to the colonies and fallen a victim to these same bushrangers. They had killed and robbed the real criminal, and the captain only asked one reward from the man he had rescued for all his kindness, and that was to personate the dead but unconvicted criminal and repay him with the money of the dead man. This captain of bushrangers had won the young fellow's heart with his kindness; the dead man ought to have been in his place. How do you think that young man ought to have answered the bushranger leader, who had been so good to him?"

"Like a man, and refuse to become a criminal!" said Helen Craven impetuously.

"Hold one moment. Do you think any true woman would love a man who could make this sacrifice of friendship and revenge and prove himself an outlawed convict?" cried the Honourable Percy Shafton, turning abruptly upon her, and flinging away his unsmoked cigar.

"Yes, although he were thrice convicted for the crime he did not commit, if she was already interested in him."

"Thank you, Helen, I——"

"Please, sir, did you call me?" observed the obsequious James H. Black, gliding up to the pair. "I thought I heard '*James!*'"

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## CHAPTER III.

### A SUCCESSFUL COLONIST.

TURRO-SIDE STATION, for the head station of Mr. Richard Craven was named after the lake which lay within its boundary, occupied a considerable track of land on the borders of the Gascoyne and Eastern Divisions of Western Australia.

Mr. Craven had been trained in the home country as a farmer and stock-breeder, and was gifted with a keen perception of what was best in land, therefore when he made his selections in this out-of-the-way portion of the colony, he had a pretty fair idea of what he was about.

An Irishman by birth, from County Cork, Mr. Richard Craven belonged to the good old stock of gentleman farmers, whom generations of adversity had gradually diminished in worldly possessions, until the land of his fathers no longer offered him anything else than genteel poverty; therefore, as soon as he came to years of discretion, he had solved the hard problem by realizing what he could of his impoverished estates, and emigrating to Australia. This was about the year 1828, two years after Major Lockyer and his party settled in the portion which

was afterwards called Western Australia, and when he was himself twenty-four years of age.

He brought with him from the "ould counthry" a couple of his own retainers and a maid-servant, who had been born in the service of his race, and the transplanting of these faithful dependants was a source of greater personal discomfort than what he afterwards experienced from the hired hands, who were the real tyrants of this colony in its infant state; for although these retainers stuck to him like privileged burrs, yet they never ceased to grumble about the lost luxuries of their native land.

For five years the struggle was a desperate one, and might have discouraged a less resolute and hopeful character, but Richard Craven was composed of the right stuff to make a good pioneer settler. The first seeds which he planted after the hard work of clearing the ground, were destroyed by the heat of the summer, and when at last he succeeded in raising others, the crows or the black fellows did what the sun had done before—rendered his outlay and work abortive.

He had little or no experience in sheep, although he knew a good deal about horses, cows and pigs; therefore he suffered many heart-breaks over his early attempts at squatting. His little flock—for at this time the price of a sheep was four pounds, so that he could not afford to purchase many—went blind, died suddenly, were stolen by the natives, worried by the wild dogs, or else went about starving during the dry season. His pigs ran wild and demolished his garden; his cows and poultry had to be fed on purchased provender at such an extravagant price that they literally devoured gold; the men he was forced

to hire, demanded food, rum and clothes at a time when there were none to be had for love or money, and loafed about without the slightest regard for their master's interest; even his own faithful, home-bred retainers very quickly got infected with the general spirit of antagonism, and, although they stuck to him, they were as lazy, as exorbitant and as mutinous as were the strangers.

Ah! that was a time when men needed pluck and energy to be settlers, but Richard Craven had both these qualities in the highest degree; so that, as the years slipped away, he became the conqueror. He was the owner of vast tracts of country, and, as one of the early colonists, had his pick of the land, and selected wisely; the climate was almost perfect, and after frequent failures and experiments had taught him what was best for the soil, *it* no longer disappointed him.

There was a young lady at home who had parted from him with wild grief, yet kept true to him during these long years of trial, and who prepared herself during the waiting for her future bush-life, so that as soon as she felt she would not be another dead-weight on him, packed up her belongings and came out to help him, despite his remonstrances, for he wanted her to wait until he had the house ready, but that was not her idea of love at all; so one day a vessel landed her at Fremantle, and she came upon him and took possession of that first rough shanty, as yet doorless and windowless as well as furnitureless, and after this advent, comfort and luck began to take their seats at his log fireside.

She was a wonderful manager, this Kathleen Craven, with a way about her that the most dis-

contented could not resist; so that when the hands came with a fresh demand, she sent them back to their work with future vague promises, which satisfied them far more than present concessions would have done; a regular good sort, they vowed her to be, for whom it was a pleasure to work, and as their grievances were mostly the effect of too much freedom and indulgence, long before the time came for the promises to be fulfilled, they had forgotten all about their fanciful demands. A little Irish blarney goes a long way in the paving of the high road of peace and harmony.

At the time Kathleen arrived in the colony and became Mrs. Craven, her husband possessed over fourteen thousand acres of ground in different allotments, a patch of land in the township of Perth upon which he had raised a small house, the farm on which he lived, lying about twenty miles distant from Perth, and covering about two thousand acres, another grant of land, eighty miles inland, on which he kept his sheep, and the other portions not yet decided upon as to locality.

His live stock, which he had started with, had been six ewes, one she goat, one cow and two bullocks, with four ducks and two hens, and that was only after the first year of colonial life. On this fifth year he was the owner of four hundred ewes, two hundred lambs, ten cows, sixteen bullocks, three horses, half-a-dozen goats and two dozen pigs; his stock of fowls still fluctuated, for the native dogs played sad havoc amongst them at times.

He had not raised all these from his original stock of course, but gradually acquired those which were

not born on his lands by bartering the produce of grain, hay and vegetables for what he wanted.

For the first three years his outlay had been between three to four hundred pounds per year over and above what he made by farming. On the fourth year, although wages had risen double, he had expended about one hundred and fifty; while for the six months before his wife came he had spent fifty pounds in wages, provisions and stock over and above his winnings.

But with the advent of the charming and managing Kathleen, he drew no more upon his sadly-diminished capital; for although this neglected colony was by no means past its troubles and strugglings for existence and recognition, the worldly trials of Richard Craven were over. The clergyman who married them made a barter for his holy services, the wedding-feast came out of their own yard, garden and orchard. And after their wedding every moon that grew added to their stores.

Year by year their stock increased, from six hundred sheep to six thousand, and from that to sixty thousand, and then the farm, where they had spent so many happy days, had to be placed under the charge of an overseer, while they went farther north and east in search of pastures new.

Thus Turro-side had been found and redeemed from the wilderness, with a large and comfortable station built upon it, having out-houses, boothies, wool sheds, and all the other accompaniments of a prosperous sheep-owner's station. A man would take two days to ride over it, and Richard Craven was reckoned to be one of the warmest men in the colony.

Twenty-four years ago he had landed in Fremantle

with some stock and two thousand pounds odd in gold, the sum strictly needful to any one who wishes to die a millionaire in a new colony, although some have achieved the same end with the proverbial sixpence at the start, yet that is a risky experiment in such a place as Western Australia.

He had lived and worked like a Spartan and still gloried in early rising, hard work, and simple living, and now, at the age of forty-eight, looked fully ten years younger and preserved the free and gentlemanly habits of his early life, thanks a good deal to the companion who had helped him on, and who never forgot that she was a lady.

He was a tall, handsome man, whom any girl would have been proud to have owned as a father, six feet two inches in his stockings, and upright as a soldier, with the fine features, bright blue eyes and black hair of the Celt, and having the generous impulses of hospitality, and the fiery impetuosity which distinguishes that race when they happen to be Irish-Celts. There was no house in the colony where visitors were made more welcome; indeed, with the number of bed-rooms Turro-side resembled a good-sized hotel rather than a private residence, and never a tramp was turned away empty-handed unless he was a well-known sundowner, or was suspected to have come with evil intent.

He was one of the most hospitable of Irishmen, which is saying a good deal in the way of hospitality, but that was only with those whom he considered worthy of his lavish welcome; at the first sign or hint given him of unworthiness he became one of the most unbending of judges, that is to say, having all his life

worshipped honour and principle, he could find no sort of excuse for weakness or vice. A mean man he despised; to a criminal he was pitiless and relentless, and would let such a backslider starve before his face without lifting a finger to help him or her.

And this was where the more pliant Mrs. Craven came in as a true helpmate and softener-down of the rough edges of that relentless sense of justice which made him at times appear so harsh; the sinner retired abashed before the man who could not understand any temptation strong enough to make a man unworthy of himself, to receive pity and consolation from the gentle lady whose own innate purity and pride of caste had also always securely hedged her round.

Mrs. Craven was a beautiful woman yet, in spite of her forty-five years; some women improve as they grow older, and she was one of them. As her daughter now was, so she had been twenty-six years before. Of medium height, not quite so plump as she had been in her youth, yet wonderfully graceful and lady-like, with a superabundance of brown hair, and a pair of mirth-loving, sunny brown eyes, the merry lustre of which defied time to subdue, for where her husband somewhat lacked humour, and in consequence of that want, was likewise deficient in charity, she supplied it with her keen sense of humour and tenderness.

Helen was more like her mother than her father in many ways: she had the same tenderness and quick wit, with that loyalty and staunchness towards her friends which made her stand by them through sunshine and shadow, as her mother had stuck to the lover of her youth, but she had also the impetuosity

and lofty contempt for anything mean which distinguished her father. That was before the Hon. Percy Shafton had crossed her path, but now that he had come, her powers of discrimination between meanness and nobility had become slightly uncertain, that is to say, Percy was nobleness personified, and all that he now did seemed noble, except, perhaps, the humouring of that obnoxious manservant, Black.

There was another personage who resided as a perpetual guest at Turro-side station, whom it is as well to mention at this stage, and that was Uncle Timothy, the younger brother of Richard Craven, who, having spent his share of the patrimony, after the manner in which an Irish gentleman would be likely to do in the old country, where his former greatness was known, and with whom work in any shape was a degradation, was at last forced to come out and settle upon his degraded brother, like the two faithful family servants, Pat Regan and Phil Miles, with that faithful kitchen maid, Bridget Brannigan.

Mister Timothy Craven, for no one ever thought of calling him Tim, had the same ideas about the degradation of work that he had always held, and considered that his mission in life was to uphold the family dignity. He was a confirmed bachelor, who went about the station with a sportsman's gun on his shoulder at such times as he went about at all, dressed in the garb of a country sporting gentleman. His self-imposed duty consisted in entertaining the visitors with glowing accounts of the vanished glories of the Cravens, and helping them to sample the spirits. A slenderly-built, red-nosed and dyspeptic patrician he was, who looked at least ten years older than his

brother, as men who have wasted their health and their fortunes are apt to do.

"I do not object to the colonies generally as far as they have got," Mr. Timothy used to observe. "For we all get to know each other very quickly, and we have as good blood amongst us as in the old country; my only objection is that it is so difficult for a gentleman to keep his hands clean and be able to live out here, or to look like a gentleman with the clothes one is forced to wear, although, for the matter of that, I have seen them as much patched in Ireland, but there you can get a decent tailor who is not unwilling to trust you with a suit for the sake of your connections, but here one can neither find a decent tailor nor an hour of credit."

Timothy got all his clothes sent out from London to his brother's order, but often he had to wait eighteen months or two years before the order came to hand, so that with his pants patched in a dozen places and his boots parting company with their soles and uppers, he had some excuse for railing against fate at times.

However, at the present time, he was not in a hurry for the next arrival of a ship, as, being of a size with the Hon. Percy, that visitor had made him free of his extensive wardrobe, so that Timothy was able to strut about in his borrowed feathers and extol the grandeur of the Cravens in proper style.

"I often wonder at my brother, do you know, Shafton, putting his hands to the dirty work as he does; it's enough to make our ancestors turn in their graves, for he is the first of our family who ever did such a thing."

"With the result, Uncle Timothy," retorted Helen.

"that he could now buy up the Cravens in their grandest days twice over if he liked."

"True for you, my dear, and for that I trust they may forgive the way he has brought down the family dignity. I'll trouble you, Shafton, for another of those good cigars of yours. Ah, that's one of the many disadvantages of this young colony, where even the best amongst us can smoke only rank tobacco. Cigars are as hard to get as credit, and where every man is as good as his master, barring the convicts, Shafton; we draw the line strictly at them."

"I have seen that you do," replied the Hon. Percy, looking over the landscape, which spread brightly before them on this sunny January morning.

## CHAPTER IV.

### LOVE UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

HELEN CRAVEN had not been so contented for a long time, as she felt one day about a month after the coming of the backward Percy Shafton, for at last she managed to secure him all to herself without the everlasting supervision of that obnoxious man servant.

During these weeks which passed away, she had progressed very fast along the thorny pathway of love, in as far as her own feelings were concerned, while she was as positive that her affections were returned with an equal intensity, as a woman can be who knows by intuition the different signs, yet he had not spoken the words which she was sure must come, and although he had often been on the verge of the eagerly longed-for declaration, something—the sneaking man servant, most times, had always inter-

vened, as on that old year's night in the garden, and made him dumb.

What was it he wanted to confess besides the love she was positive he had for her? That would have been easy enough for him to say, with the candid encouragement she gave him, for she was no coy or affected maiden, but when she liked she said so plainly, and when she loved she spoke it out nearly as plainly—much more so than if she had received a conventional town education; while as for him, he was not by any means a sheepish young man, but showed on ordinary occasions, a coolness and composure which betokened a mind not easily put out, and also she had seen by a hundred signs which were not to be translated, how passionately he loved her, as she now knew that she loved him.

Why then did he remain so obstinately or diffidently silent, when her heart was thirsting for the sweet words to be poured into it?—why did he walk or stand so passively beside her when she longed for him to take her in his arms as he ought to do under the circumstances?—why didn't he kiss her as a man ought to do to a girl that loves him and whom he loves?—and worse than all, what right had that valet to shadow him in this way, and force her to go to bed night after night with the tears in her young eyes and her heart sore with vexation?

Had he done something in the past that he was ashamed about and yet felt he must confess before he told of his love? Botheration take the confessions of young men! As if a girl cared what they had done in the past so long as she was sure of their love in the present and future. Besides, with Percy—her Percy, it

could not have been very bad, she was positive about that, for was he not everything that was honourable, manly and noble?

"Heigho! I wish I could speak for him and tell him never to mind about those scrapes that I'm sure are troubling him and making me so miserable; some people are so sensitive, that they can neither make love, nor die, without raking together all the dead old weeds which have been uprooted ages ago and mixing them with the roses or the lilies, as if that was of any use to any one."

But what had this oily scoundrel of a servant to do with it?—he had been picked up in the Colonies, so that the fault may have been a recent one. No! that could not be. Percy, if ever he had any wild oats to sow, must have sown them long ago, for never had she looked upon eyes so earnest and tender before.

What was it? Night after night she had lain thinking these matters out in a misery of conjecture, wishing that she could force his secret from him so that she might take it all upon her own tender shoulders, and so leave him free to love her only, and each night she left him no farther forward than the last; it was beginning to pass the boundary line of vexation with this impulsive bush girl, and entering the domain of maddening exasperation.

This day, however, she had him all to herself, and miles away from any interference; and she made up her mind to have it out with him before James H. Black or anyone else could come between them.

That very attentive person had asked for and obtained a few days' leave of absence; some friends of his were to pass north about thirty miles from the

station, and he had gone to meet them, as he expected they would bring him letters, and as the wool packing season was at its busiest, all the other men available were hard at work, so Helen took the opportunity and proposed a kangaroo hunt to her uncle and Percy, with the result that the uncle, not being that morning inclined for such violent exercise, had backed out, leaving the pair to hunt by themselves.

They had enjoyed a glorious gallop together through the bush, without however paying much attention to the kangaroos, and had now halted ten miles beyond the boundary of Turro-side Station, by the entrance of a little gully that divided a wooded hill, a favourite spot with Helen, for here rocks and boulders started out from the sides and formed nice sheltered nooks where people could sit down and talk comfortably without being disturbed.

At the entrance to this gully, she dismounted and led the way with her horse behind her, Percy following her gravely, as if he knew her present purpose and how useless it was to evade the question any longer.

They had been talking and laughing merrily enough as they dashed along over the dried grass and baked ground before they came to this spot, both a little artificially, for the same thoughts occupied their minds although in a different way—the desire to terminate this suspense; and now, as they went on crushing the dried twigs under their feet, a silence fell upon them which only the crackling of the dried wood, the displacing of a stone, or the chirping of the locusts broke.

Overhead the sky stretched crystal clear, and of that luminous yet hard blue which only Australian skies can produce, the peculiar dryness and heat

that appear so pitiless in their intensity. In the gully the same intensity of dry heat generated in a gaseous haziness, making the leafage of the gums look bluer than even they were, and the tattered fringes of the loose bark hang like grey rags about fleshless bones; the granite boulders glistened prismatically, while from the channel flashed detached and shallow water-holes like polished discs of metal.

It was the height of the dry season and every object showed it with painful distinctness; the atmosphere felt like that of a heated oven, the ground was startlingly bare, and at every step they took, little clouds of dust rose up that had formerly been grass, while as the horses walked after their owners, they drooped their heads despondently, making no attempt to nibble at the shrivelled leaves which they passed or brushed through so listlessly.

There was one cool-looking object in this otherwise death-in-life valley, and that was the pretty Australian girl who was leading the way so heedlessly to her fate, and as her companion followed her with shoulders also slightly stooping under the *weight* of that fierce sun-glare, he evidently thought so, for after the one wearied glance up to that pitiless sky, and around on this parching landscape, he kept his eyes constantly upon her with a look in them of yearning passion, humility and despair.

He was not good enough for her—no man ever is good enough for the young girl who has given up her fresh heart's wealth to him, and the true lover must ever feel humbled before he gets accustomed to this overpowering charity.

What a perfect flower she looked as she walked so

lightly over the stones, turning now and again her bewitching face towards him, and smiling as she led him on to the shadows, while he tried to smile back again with a gripping at his heart that made his face almost as grey as the landscape behind them; she noted, of course, that pallor, and the twitching of the dry lips, as she read the expression of dog-like love in the eyes, and while her own heart throbbed with anticipation she vowed that she would help the poor, dear, bashful fellow as much as she possibly could to get out of his present misery.

Shaded by the broad-brimmed Leghorn hat, her face appeared low-toned and dark in contrast with the sun-bleached whiteness of her linen riding-dress, the long skirts of which drooped over her arm, and she had her mother's graceful, gliding walk and light tread, which seemed to skim the earth, with all those other graces which youth gives to the owner before sorrow comes to rob it of its elasticity; she had never experienced anything deeper in that way than little vexations as yet, and the young man coming after her had been the unconscious cause of most of those small clouds upon her otherwise unclouded life-sky; all the rain, and gloom, and storms, with which life is always beset had yet to come.

"What a darling he will be when once I have broken down that horrid reserve, for he must speak to-day. Ah, yes, he must either ask me or I shall have to ask him, before he gets out of my lair."

This gully she had named her lair, for although there were many other gullies and nooks by far more picturesque within her father's grounds, yet that this lay outside added to its charm.

"There is a cave a little farther on, Percy, which I call Picnic Cave, where we can sit down, cool and comfortable, and take our lunch."

She called him Percy by this time, for bush girls soon dispense with all formality, as she had insisted on him addressing her by her Christian name.

After a little time they reached a portion of the gully where the rocks appeared jumbled together in a strange and wild confusion, with a black opening gaping amidst them like a church doorway; here she entered, after tying up her horse to one of the tough roots that hung over the cliff face.

"There, the horses will do all right until we are ready for them again. Now come inside, Percy, and see my hall."

The only light that entered the cavern was from the doorway, so that for a moment Percy Shafton found himself as if in total darkness after the vivid glaring of the mid-day sun; then, as his eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he began to discern objects round him, and saw that he was within a fairly large cavern of earth and rocks, with the ground soft under his feet, and the atmosphere cool and dry; in fact, it was like coming out of the heated streets at midsummer in London and taking shelter under the roof of St. Paul's.

"This is nice, isn't it, Percy?" observed Helen, taking a seat on one of the stones and beginning to open the small lunch basket which she had brought with her.

"Very nice, Helen."

"Come over here, Percy, where we can sit together, and I'll spread the napkin over both our knees, for you must be both hungry and thirsty—I am, I can tell you, after that gallop."

She was a natural girl in all her ways, and was soon very busy with the sandwiches; then all at once she paused and looked at him.

"You are not eating, Percy—what is the matter with you?"

"Oh, yes, I am doing famously, Helen." He made a pretence of biting the sandwich which he had hitherto held in his hand without tasting it, but his companion was not to be deceived, for she looked at him fixedly, and answered:

"No, Percy, taking one bite of a sandwich, and bolting it even without chewing it, is not what I call eating—it is the same as swallowing nasty medicine. Now *I* made those sandwiches, and I thought you would like them."

"So I do, Helen—so I do, or rather would do if I could enjoy anything to-day, but the fact is, I sat up rather late last night with your uncle, and, I suppose, must have smoked too many cigars, for I do not feel up to eating much to-day."

"Percy!"

She was leaning her chin on her hand now, with her elbow resting on the white napkin over her knees, and her brown eyes fixed upon him, while his sought the ground.

"Yes, Helen?"

"Look at me, Percy, for I wish to speak seriously to you, and ask you such a lot of questions."

"Will that do?"

He gave a forced, short laugh which had no merriment about it, although he tried to speak lightly, as he turned his troubled eyes upon her, for

now that they were used to the twilight-like light they could see each other fairly well.

"Yes, that will do for the present."

She gave a little sigh as she said this, for she was wishing that he would put his arm round her waist; it would be so much easier for her to say what she had brought him here to say, but, instead of doing this, he now sat with his hands pressing each other nervously, and that mutilated sandwich between them.

"I have told you, Percy, already, how very different you are to what I fancied you to be from your former letters and photos."

"Yes, yes! I am a very different man from the original of those photographs, or the writer of those letters—a man who has suffered much, and——"

"I know, Percy, but I don't want to hear about that yet—I'd rather listen to your opinion of me. Have I disappointed you in any way—I mean, do I come within a mile, let us say, of your ideal—of what I was like from my photographs?"

She said this very coyly, for it was a very daring cast of the line, all the while wishing he that would only open his arms so that she might hide her face on his breast; but no, he still sat with his hands folded together, or rather clutched together convulsively, and his dry lips twitching and quivering in a strange fashion, yet he answered huskily:

"I never had an ideal that came within a hundred miles of you, Miss Craven."

"Helen—have I not insisted on being Helen, Percy?"

"Helen then!"

He gasped out the words, while the wondering girl saw large drops of sweat start out upon his brow.

"You are still hot, Percy."

She wiped the drops away with her handkerchief, and then touching that forehead lightly with her hand, to her surprise she found it as cold as ice.

"Nay; you are cold, not hot, Percy—say you are not ill?"

"Not at all, I never felt better in my life, but you were going to say——"

"I was going to ask you if you liked me as well as you thought you would before you saw me?"

Surely he can ask no more encouragement from a poor girl, she thought, as she gazed on him anxiously yet tenderly—then all at once a wild thrill of happiness and timidity swept over her, as she saw the flame of passion flash from his eyes, while the unappreciated sandwich fell from his hands as they were suddenly torn apart, as he sobbed:

"Do I like you, Helen Craven—do I like you? Oh, God! oh, God, to call what I am feeling—*like!*"

"Percy!"

The arms were open, and she was sinking naturally into the place where she had longed to be, when a shadow darkened the cave mouth, and a carefully-modulated voice said:

"Surely I hear voices—hope I don't intrude. Deuce take the darkness, for I cannot see an inch before my nose."

## CHAPTER V.

### HELEN'S MISSION.

IN an instant of time, that slight but carefully-prepared lunch was scattered in all directions, and the two actors in this tender scene were on their feet and standing with a considerable space between them, then the voice once more made itself heard.

"Ah, I can see now, and apologise for my intrusion, but seeing two horses outside, and not being sure of my way, I ventured—halloa! is it my old friend Shafton? Who'd have thought it, and how are you?"

Percy advanced slowly to the speaker, and clasped the outstretched hand, then he turned to where Helen stood battling with her disappointment, and said:

"This is the friend that I expected; permit me to introduce him to you. Captain Wildrake—Miss Craven."

He was not overjoyed evidently at meeting with his friend, and introduced him in rather a stiff and reluctant manner, but the Captain did not seemingly notice this lack of warmth, for immediately his hat was off and he was bowing respectfully to the white-robed figure that loomed from the obscurity.

"Delighted, I am sure, to meet you, Miss Craven, and in such a cool place, for I am about dead beat with my long ride through the bush in this awful heat; indeed, I fancy I must have lost my way, for I have been wandering for hours in a circle, and at last

let my horse carry me as he liked, and so the wise beast brought me here."

"Our horses posssibly attracted it," answered Helen very quietly, yet feeling very bitter and antagonistic towards this intruder for coming at such a *mal-à-propos* moment. "We have been out all the morning also and had just come in for a shelter from the sun."

"And a capital shelter it is, as cool as a cathedral! By Jove, it is a most interesting place; a native temple, I should say, that is, if the natives of this country have temples. Have they, Miss Craven? I am quite a new chum, like my friend Shafton, you see."

"Yes, I fancy this has been one of their places which they have used for their mystic rites—at least there are native marks on the rocks."

"How very interesting. Is it far from Turro-side?"

"About ten miles," replied Helen. "I expect you are both hungry and tired, Captain Wildrake."

"Not at all hungry, for I have my provisions and a flask with me, Miss Craven, but hot — yes, confoundedly hot."

"We can wait while you cool down if you like."

"No, don't wait for me, an hour or so more in the sun won't make much difference, now that I have come upon you. Well, Percy, old fellow, and how are you?—better I hope than you were when we parted last?"

He turned towards his friend affectionately as he spoke, and Helen took a more careful glance at him.

Both men were of about the same height and build, but there the resemblance ended, for whereas

Percy was fair-skinned, with brown hair and yellow moustache, Captain Wildrake was very dark.

She could see that he was young, good-looking and gentlemanly, with large black eyes and heavy jet-black moustache completely covering his mouth, while underneath it was a square, hard jaw such as so many military men have.

His voice was very soft and his manners affectionate towards his friend as he placed his hand caressingly on the other's shoulder, yet for all that she felt that she hated this man with a most unreasonable and instinctive force, considering that he must have come upon them accidentally, hated him for doing what the man-servant had so often managed before, and with this anger and abhorrence was mixed a chill fear—she could not tell what for, unless it was that he had known Percy before she did.

Percy, she saw, was not easy with his friend ; he had been miserable looking before, even at the moment when that love pain had been torn from his white lips, but what she saw now was a settled look of such despair as a man might have who had seen hope fly for ever from him.

Yet through all these conflicting emotions, a wild exultation surged in her heart, for the usual interruption had come a moment too late, as although the exact words which she wanted had not been uttered, the rubicon had been crossed. He was her own now, she knew, and with this fond assurance a curious feeling woke up in her as if their sexes had been reversed, and that she was to be the one to protect and defend him.

She loved him the better for this, strange as it may appear, for she had now made up her mind that he was

environed by some evil or some calamity, which she had yet to discover—but that did not matter now, he was good and noble, she knew by the same feminine sixth sense which warned her against this new-comer, and having satisfied herself on these points, love did the rest.

So she stood back and watched the two men with keen eyes which missed nothing, and as she saw that pitiful passiveness and hopelessness which to other eyes would have degraded this lover, and shorn him of his manliness, she dived deeper and, although unconscious of the cause, yet the yearning to take that sorrow and carry it for him grew every instant stronger, until it was difficult to say which passion predominated in her fresh young heart, the loving pity or the pitying love.

"I shall find it out," she murmured to herself, "and lift it from him; my hero must rise yet above this misery, he must break the net which is round him and be happy and free to love me without pain, and it will be my mission to comfort him, my darling—my darling!"

The Hon. Percy Shafton did not look very heroic or noble at this moment, as he stood by the side of his dark friend, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and a passive air about him that was pathetic enough certainly, yet showed up badly beside the affectionate air of proprietorship which that gently-laid hand on his shoulder accentuated; this air roused Helen to a perfect fury of resistance as she saw it, so that she could have struck this easy patron with her little fist in the face, the action was so affable, so possessive, so—so hateful that it made her gnash her teeth with silent rage

"Ha! Percy, old chap, you aren't quite yourself yet, you want picking up. I must have a long chat with you."

"No, I am not myself yet, but I must try to be that if I can."

"To be sure, and I'll help you while I am with you. You see, Miss Craven, my friend here has had a shake and no mistake."

"Yes," replied Helen, outwardly calm, inwardly boiling with anger. "He has not been in such good spirits as we would like."

"Spirits. Ah! Miss Craven, he was the life of us before he had that shake, but it's only nerves, a little bracing up and my company will soon put him right, and I mean to stick to you, old chap, stick to you like a burr, till you are all right.

"Thank you, Wildrake."

Helen could endure no more of it, so she said:

"If you have rested enough, gentlemen, perhaps we may once more mount and get back to the station."

"With pleasure, Miss Craven. Come on, old fellow."

They passed out to the open, and here Captain Wildrake turned gallantly to assist the young lady to mount, but he was too late, for, with a light leap she was already in her saddle and beginning to lead the way down the gully, so that they had only to follow the example she set.

She had walked into the gully, not that she strictly required to do this, for the passage was clear enough, but from a natural desire to linger on the way to her fate; yet now that the paradise had been invaded, she felt that she could not get too quickly away from it, for with that man beside him, her

lover was not half her own ; she wanted to get home as quickly as her horse could go, so that she might get to her room to think it all over quietly and plan out something to the making of her lover happy, for she felt that this had become her mission, and she was not one to pause or hang back from the sacrifice, now that her mind was made up ; he was hers to plot and plan for, and with such a nature as hers—so like her mother's—to sacrifice for love's sweet sake seemed only to be the proper destiny of a true woman. Better a thousand times to have to suffer and sacrifice for love, than to have love without sacrifice.

Her heart beat high as she thought these things out; she was by nature heroic and romantic, and in youth, people of this temperament find more pleasure in sacrifice than in indulgence, in her past life she had had all that she wished for, so that her innate aspirations had lain dormant waiting upon such an opportunity as had now occurred.

Of course it was not possible for her to have loved anything base or mean, but this hero of hers could not be either—unfortunate, perhaps, but that was one of the charms about him. She had never felt very sympathetic towards the aboriginals, for instance, because she had been brought up to regard them as great pests, like the dingoes and flying foxes, and as much beyond the pale of human consideration as were the kangaroos whom she had so often herself hunted to death.

The assigned hands also, that is, the convicts lent out by government on hire to the squatters inspired in her nothing except disgust, or at the best, indifference ; they were such a servile and degraded set

of hypocrites, as a rule, for the political prisoners were not often hired out; they were not obedient enough to be made into good hands for those superior human beings, the free squatters. Besides, they were always on the look-out for a chance to make an escape from what they considered to be an unjust sentence, so that Helen never had an opportunity of judging convicts from such specimens, and this, with her temperament was perhaps as well for her peace of mind.

I daresay, in the village where Joan of Arc was reared there were lots of other outcomes for her heroic efforts without her going to war for the sake of her country, as there are in every life, yet Joan could no more refuse the mission when it came to her than could Helen Craven now. It is destiny that rules these matters with men and women, and when the hour comes it is useless to urge reasons against the special missions for which they had been ordained; they must love, or sacrifice or devote their lives to the object, irrational as it may appear to other eyes, and this is what had now fallen upon this free bush girl.

The convicts who were employed by Mr. Craven at Turro-side, and he had occasion to employ so many of them that the station was more like a small township than anything else, were perhaps as degraded a set of men as could be possibly linked together, and the conditions with which they were surrounded could not but make them worse in this comparative freedom than they were in their prison; they were treated with less consideration than if they had been bought slaves. True, they had food enough given to them, but every inducement which could tend to make a man vile was held out to them to be vile.

Fawning upon their masters, and the betraying of their comrades, were reckoned to be the safest and readiest means to take for their own advancement; they were not and could never be admitted to an equality with any of the free workmen, no matter how they tried to repent or break from their former lives; they had no rights and never would have in that colony. In New South Wales they might outlive their crime and punishment, but never in Western Australia, where the settlers were conservative to the backbone.

When they misbehaved or attempted to show the spirit of men, they were either whipped on the station, and they were lucky to get this favour, or sent back to Fremantle or Perth, with a bad character, so that only two courses lay open to these lawless outcasts, either to live as traitors and hypocrites or else take to the bush and become beasts of prey.

It was therefore excusable, if Helen Craven passed over the convicts and aboriginals to pour out her dormant wealth of sympathy on the stranger; it was only natural, for few of us can be heroic over what daily custom has rendered common.

As they now rode across the country the conversation was kept up mainly by Captain Wildrake, who was wonderfully cheerful and did not appear to mind the laconic replies of the other two to his many questions and efforts to make himself agreeable. Helen, herself a first-rate equestrian, noticed that he rode remarkably well, also that his horse was one of the best she had ever seen; indeed horse and rider appeared to move with such perfect sympathy and unity that she could not withhold her admiration from the well-matched pair.

"That is a splendid mare of yours, Captain Wildrake."

"Ah, Black Sally, she is a beauty and as clever as she is bonnie; my only love she is, and understands every word I say, don't you, my pet?"

He patted her very gently and fondly as he spoke, which the fine animal seemed to appreciate, for she arched her neck, while her delicate nostrils quivered with pleasure; she was jet black and without a white hair upon her.

"She doesn't know the prick of a spur, Miss Craven, and will permit no one else on her back except me, while I never think of tying her up, for she would wait for me a twelvemonth if I asked her."

Helen's heart softened a little as she heard this swarthy captain praise his mare, for she dearly loved her own horse.

"By the way, I met your man-servant this morning, Shafton; he was riding down to meet some overlanders, and directed me so far on my way, although I lost it again shortly after I left him. I hope my own two fellows who are bringing on my traps may not do the same. However, they are more accustomed to the bush, so I don't suppose they will go astray."

"Have you a long leave of absence, Captain Wildrake?" enquired Helen, as Percy did not make any remark to this speech.

"Oh, hasn't my friend Shafton told you?—careless fellow that he is," replied the Captain. "I have left the army and am thinking of joining the native police, if I can find an opening up this quarter. I fancy I should like to have some experience in the dispersing

of natives and the tracking down of escaped convicts and bushrangers."

"My father may help you in this ambition; indeed, if such is your desire, you will be most welcome to this part of the colony, for we are very badly looked after in that respect," answered Helen, thinking that with such a billet the Captain would not likely be much about the station.

So the ten miles were quickly covered and early in the afternoon they dashed past the sheds and workers' huts, and soon after drew up at the broad verandah of hospitable Turro-side Station, where they were made welcome by Mrs. Craven and the gentlemanly uncle Timothy.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### AT TURRO-SIDE STATION.

TURRO-SIDE was looking up, and not unlikely to become an important inland town before long. When a man once gets a name for being lucky and successful, other men who also wish to become successful, follow in his tracks, hoping to glean some of the luck which is supposed to attend upon him.

The surveyors had paid a visit to the place and planned out the site of a future city, for all the Australian townships are laid out in a city-like extensive way; streets and squares had been pegged out and the allotments put up for sale at Perth, of which not a few had been taken up, although as yet very little clearing or building had taken place.

Mr. Richard Craven having been duly consulted as to the proposed site, fixed it on the borders of his own

estate; in fact his boundary line ran exactly through the centre of the future city, so that he was half proprietor of the ground and likely to reap a large profit from the investment if it ever came to anything.

His own house stood about five miles distant from this future township of Turro-side, so that it was a very convenient distance from him, and as he had considerable influence at head-quarters, the government had sent up a large gang of convicts with their overseers and guards to make roads and clear away the forests, when wanted, that spread so densely around.

It was a good site, for the river that ran through Mr. Craven's estate was a wide one, and except in very dry seasons, seldom altogether dry, and this same river-bed ran past the future town, having high banks on either side with a good ford at this part, therefore, while they were likely to have a fair supply of water, even through the summer, there was only the most remote probability of ever being flooded, even in the wettest season.

As I have said, the building of this city was still in its infancy. Mr. Craven had erected three or four temporary wooden buildings on his side of the town, one of which was used as a lock-up, another he had let to an adventurous selector as a bush house of entertainment, and another was used as a chapel, for the squatter was very particular about the observance of Sunday on his estate, and rode down regularly each seventh day to conduct the service to his men, who knew better than to be absent; at least the convict element was always punctual, although the same could not be said for the free employees.

The government on their side had built a rough

barracks for the soldiers and overseers sent with the convicts, with quarters close at hand for these same convicts, so that it may be admitted that the nucleus of civilization had been formed, since the church, the public house, and the jail, were already planted.

The advent of Captain Wildrake was therefore hailed by the squatter with peculiar satisfaction, and when he heard of his intention to settle in the country, he was prompt enongh in using his influence to procure him the post which he desired.

Captain Wildrake, as he had informed Helen, was no longer connected with the army, and, as he pleasantly informed his host, had never been much of a soldier, a few months of service at home was all that he had put in, for he frankly confessed that he was a poor man and must work for his living.

Fortunately for him the officer in charge of the barracks wanted a holiday and therefore added his voice to that of the squatter, so that all difficulties being smoothed away, the appointment quickly came from head-quarters commissioning Captain Wildrake to take the place of the officer who had requested his leave and also authorising him to raise the number of men and natives that he considered needful for the protection of the future selectors and outlying settlers already in this part of the country, from the troublesome natives and convict outlaws.

His district was a wide one, and when he had organised his force, would necessitate his taking long excursions; to get that force together was now the one object of his life, so that, much to Helen's satisfaction he was a good deal engaged, at least, during the day although he passed most of his evenings at the station.

He had become a great favourite with both the squatter himself and his fastidious but needy brother Timothy, for with the one he was excellent company, and possessed all the qualities to win the admiration and respect of such a man as the younger brother.

At this time the low spirits of the Hon. Percy Shafton depressed Mr. Richard Craven, who liked to have cheerful people about him, while Timothy somewhat despised him for his general abstemiousness. He was a well-informed young fellow, the squatter admitted, but dull—decidedly dull, while Timothy owned that he was gentlemanly enough, but a regular cold-water man. Only two members of that lavish household were tender and sympathetic towards this grave young fellow, and these were Helen and her mother.

The Captain was, however, the antithesis of his friend ; he was always jovial and chatty, with a fund of humorous anecdotes or happy remarks, everlastingly good-natured and never put out of temper, in fact so entertaining, affable and pliant he was, as well as so ready to stop a gap, or cover an awkwardness, as to oblige, that no one else had any occasion to take trouble, for he was a host in himself.

Nightly he sat with the rich squatter and sent him to his early bed (for the squatter was an early bird), splitting his sides with laughter at the humorous jokes and stories he had been treated to, and after he had seen the last of the wealthy man, he sat down to the bottle with Timothy and drank him also safely to bed without "shedding a hair" ; as Timothy remarked, he was a young gentleman who was worthy of the old school.

Yet in spite of his pleasant ways Helen liked him

no better than she had done at the first, which was ungrateful on her part, for never did a young man strive harder to make himself agreeable than did this friend of Percy's when with her.

He was as respectful towards her as any young maiden could wish, respectful and chivalrous in the extreme, and if his bold, black eyes glowed upon her at times with somewhat of a ghoulish light, his soft and tenderly-intoned voice and carefully-chosen words were all that they should have been ; she could see by his manners that he admired her, and she could not find fault with that, as she did not suppose Percy had told him what he had not yet said plainly to her in words.

Were Percy and he as great friends as he was always leading those round him to suppose? To her, the watcher, it seemed to be a very lop-sided friendship, for although Percy had told her that this man had once saved his life, and always appeared grateful enough for that great favour, yet he looked less happy when with his friend than he was when that friend was out of the way.

He was a man of many accomplishments, this Wildrake, a dead shot either with rifle or revolver, a finished horseman ; he could also play the piano and violin, and had a rich voice for singing, but perhaps the accomplishment on which he prided himself mostly was his cooking. As he said of himself, he was a born chef and epicure in fine dishes ; he enjoyed eating them, yet to make them was to him the most perfect pleasure in existence.

"I have often thought," he said one night, when chaffed about this accomplishment, "that if ever I lived a former existence, I must have been one of the

Roman patricians of the latter times, when that imperial city was devoted to the refinements of pleasure."

"I have thought sometimes that we may have all existed many times," replied Helen quietly.

"So do I, Miss Craven, as did the Pythagoreans, as to the transmigration of souls," replied the captain. "Indeed, sometimes when I have been sitting thinking out a special dish, a certain faint reflection of the past, when my soul was in another envelope, has come upon me, and then I feel that for the gratification of this poetic sense of eating a princedom might be considered well spent."

The speaker was always spirited in his descriptions yet underlying most of his words ran a current of unreality, but he was speaking now with an enthusiasm that was not assumed. Helen was surprised to find that he could be sincere on any subject, and amused as well that such a subject, could so far interest him, but her father frowned severely, for to him such sentiments sounded akin to blasphemy.

"You are jesting, of course, Wildrake?"

"Of course, of course," replied the young man, hastily, noticing the bad impression which he had made on his bigoted host.

"And yet, Mr. Craven, can you not imagine that there may be something soulful and poetic in the creation of a new dish or a fresh sauce?"

"No," replied Mr. Craven shortly, getting on to his feet, for it was his hour to retire. "I see no poetry in all these extravagances, only folly and weakness; a beef steak and a billy of tea are all that is needful for a strong man when he is hungry. Good-night, Monsieur Cook, good-night to all."

Captain Wildrake looked after his host with a pitying smile and then continued:

"When a man is hungry enough he must take anything that he can get—a beef steak or a bite out of his enemy, but to eat because you are hungry is only to satisfy the lowest of animal cravings, for that is what the savage beasts do; as different to the spiritual pleasures attending the eating of a well-organized dinner, as the reading about a low murder in a penny dreadful is apart from the refined delivery of a finished poem by Wordsworth, and while this exquisite delight is reserved for the appreciative diner, the composer of that dinner my well be likened to the gifted poet himself."

Was he in earnest, or poking fun at the company? He looked earnest enough as he delivered himself of this tirade, for his swarthy face was lighted with that glow which only faith can give to a face, and his black eyes shone tenderly as he stood before his astonished audience, Helen, Percy and uncle Timothy, in the dining-room; he looked in earnest, and yet the subject seemed too funny for so much touching solemnity, therefore Helen set the example by bursting into a laugh in which the others joined, that is, all except the Captain, who threw over them a glance of reproach which was not assumed.

"Excuse me for airing my hobby before you tonight. I don't often do so, and perhaps it is the only weakness I have about me which lays me open to ridicule," he said softly.

"But you must be in fun, Captain?" cried Helen impulsively.

"If you think it funny, yes, Miss Craven, as some

people may consider one of the word-pictures of Wordsworth a subject for mockery."

"Forgive me if I have wounded you on a tender point, Captain Wildrake. I would not have done so had I considered it so, yet it seems so strange——"

"That any sane person could wax enthusiastic over the art of cooking, and yet the noblest and most refined, as well as the most astute of the Romans did so, and counted a fortune well spent if it procured for them a novelty in this direction, and all this I understand, if you at present cannot, yet after I get my house in order I mean to try to convert you, for I intend to have a house warming as soon as I can and cook supper myself."

"That was why you would not accept my sandwiches on the day of your arrival?"

"Yes, Miss Craven, I had invented that morning a new flavour, and I did not wish my palate to be disturbed before I had tasted it, therefore I preferred to fast."

"That is devotion indeed," replied Helen again, laughing.

"It is easy to be devoted when one loves," said the Captain, fixing his eyes meaningly upon her.

"Good-night, gentlemen," said Helen rising quickly. "You will find the decanters in the usual place, uncle Timothy," and with a general inclination, and a stolen yet tender glance at Percy, she passed from the door he held open for her, leaving them to spend the rest of the evening by themselves.

She was glad afterwards that Percy had opened that dining-room door for her, poor maid, on this night; it comforted her somewhat in the long weary and uncertain days of gloom, that his hand had been

the last to press hers on that night, that his eyes and hers had met and kissed in that lingering good-night glance. Ah, how often she pondered upon that good-night glance and all the trivial incidents connected with this night, the crowd of mosquitoes that dashed against her face from the lobby, as Percy opened the door, the tender swish of his handkerchief as he so carefully tossed them back, the despairing passion which those loving truthful eyes spoke. Ah, yes, that "good-night" consoled her somewhat for many after sorrows.

Percy Shafton, as usual, sat silent and moody, smoking heavily, but hardly tasting the brandy and water, which Timothy had hastened to set before them; however, the other two made up for his neglect and attacked the decanter so energetically that it was not long before Uncle Timothy began to nod in an uncertain fashion at Wildrake's jokes and show other signs that he had almost reached his customary stage of preparation for a sound night's sleep.

It was a sultry night outside, and the mosquitoes were making it melodious with their humming, as they swarmed through the venetian blinds in hungry battalions, so that only the most persistent smoking could keep them at bay.

The Captain was as lively and humorous as ever, as long as Timothy could hold his head up or pretend to listen. It was always a humiliation to him when he remembered the next day how invariably he succumbed while his companions seemed still quite fresh, and he could glean no comfort from the thought that the Captain followed the milksop Percy's example and missed his turn, for he always saw, as long as he could see anything, that Wildrake drank like a thirsty fish.

and often more than glass for glass with him ; indeed, the brandy appeared to have no more effect on this young head than if it had been weak tea.

"It's all owing to the way he judiciously manages his eating," this middle-aged sot muttered, as he at length succumbed. "I must study the science of gastronomy also, and then I shall be able to hold my own with the bottle perhaps."

As his senile head dropped on his two spread arms on the table, the gay mood of Captain Wildrake changed to one of tender reproach as he bent forward to his gloomy friend and fixed his black eyes softly on him.

"You are playing your part badly, Mr. Shafton, and that is not fair to me, after all I have done for you," he began gently, when Percy lifted his head abruptly and, glancing toward Timothy, said :

"Are you sure he cannot hear us?"

"No, *he* is right enough ; only be careful, as there may be some one outside."

"Captain D——"

"Denvers Wildrake, if you please, old fellow," interrupted the other, very softly.

"What you like, as regards yourself, for I am too deeply indebted to you to expose your real character here ; but for myself I mean to give it up, for I can stand no more of this deception."

"What of your wrongs and your just revenge upon the scoundrel who ruined you?"

"I cannot go on," replied Percy doggedly.

"I suppose love has wrought this change in you," answered the Captain, still softly, yet with a palpable sneer.

"Damn it, man, do you think I can tell that innocent girl how much I love her, how this vain passion is torturing me, how this false position is killing every spark of manhood in me, and making a sneak of me? God, man! even *you*, can you not understand how impossible it is for me, in the face of this love, to take refuge in the poor thought that I have been an innocent and wronged sufferer?"

His face was transformed, and he no longer looked listless, as he sprang to his feet and raised his voice in his imploring passion, when suddenly Wildrake took him by the arm, and clapping his hand over his mouth, whispered hoarsely in his ear:

"Hush, you cursed fool, if you have a single spark of gratitude in your composition, or you will ruin me as well as yourself; there is some one listening outside."

As he uttered these words, a faint sigh broke upon the airless night, followed by a soft rustling amongst the leaves beneath the window.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### CAPTAIN WILDRAKE DISCOURSES ON THE SCIENCE OF GASTRONOMY.

THE master of Turro-side Station was in a furious passion the next night, and when he was in a rage no one could doubt the fact, as he made himself heard all over the place, for, although a gentleman in the strictest sense of the word, as regards pedigree, he was not gifted with that fine repose which distinguished the caste of Lady Clara Vere de Vere.

He had been wounded and insulted in the most sensitive part of his organism, that of a host; while Captain Wildrake had about as ungracious a part to play for the sake of friendship that ever a devoted friend had placed upon him, no less than to convey the thanks and farewells of the Hon. Percy Shafton, who had, as the squatter savagely said, taken himself off like a thief of the night, and without the slightest warning beforehand.

"Don't spake to me about your friend, the dirty dog," he roared out, when Captain Wildrake attempted to excuse this sudden freak of the absentee. "He is a sneak, sir, a miserable poltroon; no one invited him here in the first instance, although any man is welcome who comes honestly to my house, as he was made, and if he wanted to go away, who would have hindered him, I'd like to know? He had only to come like a man, and tell me he was going, and we'd have seen him off the ground with honour; but, no, the straight way don't suit the like of him; he sneaks and shuffles about with the miserable, discontented, hang-dog air of his——"

"And cannot even take an honest glass of whiskey," murmured Timothy from his side of the table.

"Right you are, brother, and cannot even take his glass like a gentleman, but mopes about like a malingering lag, and then makes a moonlight flitting Ugh! it's disgusting."

"He promises faithfully to return," remonstrated the Captain.

"Faith, then, if he does, I'll set the dogs on him, the same as if he was a murdering native," retorted the squatter.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Craven, that my friend has gone off in this fashion, but he was always a little eccentric——"

"Eccentric, do you call it, young man? We have another name for such conduct in this part of the country," interrupted the irate squatter, with a snort.

"I am sorry for his sake, and for my own; for, of course, I cannot regard myself as a welcome visitor to Turro-side after hearing your opinion of my friend, Mr. Craven."

"Speak for your friend if you like, Captain Wildrake, but for yourself, we'll forget that he was your friend, for we judge every man by himself in Western Australia; so say no more about it, but let's have dinner."

And Richard Craven bottled down his wrath, and held out his hand frankly and warmly to the luckless apologist.

Helen Craven was very pale and very silent during this parental tempest, yet kept her dark eyes fixed steadfastly upon the face of her lover's friend, a scrutiny that he bore with perfect composure. He had given her a little note of adieu from Percy, which she had glanced over very carelessly, and then put in her pocket. Her mother also had a farewell note of cool thanks; while in that letter to Mr. Craven, while thanking him for his hospitality, he deputed his friend to act for him and forward his luggage and letters.

He had gone north on an exploring expedition with some adventurers who were already on the road, and with whom his man servant had some friends. This letter was written in the old style of the Hon

Percy Shafton, with about as much information and consideration in it, as his former epistles had displayed, so that Mr. Craven was satisfied the young man must be a graceless fool.

He was wroth, of course, for he had expected better things after hearing the conversation of his visitor, and the evident leaning he had towards Helen. He, therefore, had hopes that affairs would have turned out differently, for Percy, besides having a family at his back, had recently come into a handsome estate, and eight thousand a year is not to be despised even by a wealthy squatter.

In his younger days Percy had been decidedly hard up and forced to make many a shift to keep his footing in London. This, of course, they had known about, as relations do know these things; they knew also, that he had been a reckless youth in those impecunious days when he was trading with the money-lenders on his future expectations before that wealthy aunt of his died so opportunely, and enabled him to meet his many bills floating about.

However he had been independent of all such kinds of shifts for the past two years, and was never likely to have any occasion for dodging his tailor or bootmaker again in his life, and therefore there was the less excuse for him bolting away so unceremoniously, and leaving matters in such an unsatisfactory muddle. The squatter would have felt this shabby treatment keenly if he had been only himself concerned in it, but with his daughter abandoned without a word of explanation or apology, he was doubly enraged and disappointed.

The dinner that night was a melancholy failure, for the host being full of his wrongs, could not show any

interest in the Captain's heroic attempts at outside conversation. Uncle Timothy also was decidedly upset and absent-minded, for he was thinking about the clothes which he had borrowed from this fugitive, and the fine cigars that he had enjoyed, and how he would be reduced once more to the old patched suit and station twist tobacco, if the Captain, according to his written directions, took away his friend's effects.

Of course he might manage to smuggle a loose box of the cigars, and perhaps one or two of the many suits of fine clothing, before they were packed up and no one be the wiser, and this consideration made him very thoughtful during the evening meal, for he was already making his selection with his mind's eye, yet feeling desperately injured by the absentee for forcing him to do this.

He was calculating how much he might safely borrow before that keen-eyed friend and trustee had the chance of taking an inventory, and removing the coveted treasures from him. Of course, after he had got them safely removed to his own room he could easily say that they had been presented to him before the departure of Percy, that would be easy and safe enough afterwards, only he must get them out first.

"It's not likely that the Captain will do anything to-night," he thought. "I'll do my best to keep him from that business until to-morrow, and if I can only keep sober for one night, I'll manage the transfer to-night after they go to bed."

The Captain was discoursing on his usual topic, eating and drinking, at this moment, and as his coal-black eyes were fixed on the gentlemanly Timothy, that worthy roused himself up with an effort to take

his part, seeing that no one else seemed to be paying any attention.

"Drinking is a science of calculation as well as eating, and I hold that it isn't the quantity a man takes that makes him tipsy, so much as the indiscriminate manner in which he goes to work."

"I have often thought the same thing, Wildrake," answered Timothy, and then added insinuatingly, "Now what may your system be?"

He did not want to forego his usual quantity that night, and yet he meant to retire sober if at all possible.

"To eat heartily before beginning to drink, that is, to eat just enough and with selection, so that it may carry the calculated amount of liquid which you intend to imbibe, is the main secret, and this requires careful, indeed mathematical precision, for it is the one glass too much which overcomes a man. Now, for my own part, I always sit down to dinner with a clear programme of the whole night before me, as an astute general overlooks the enemy with the ground upon which he means to fight and conquer them. If my choice of accessories is unlimited, the business is simplicity itself. I select my dishes according to their powers of alcoholic resistance, that is, if there happens to be a heavy evening before me, I may begin with oysters, brown bread and bottled stout, and when I do this, I take my little soup, just a little, you know, to set the gastric juices properly flowing, confining myself afterwards to such solids and wines as will absorb and utilize the alcohol to be afterwards imbibed.

"That is, of course, not so enjoyable a dinner as

the one when a man sits down to spend a leisurely and poetic evening by himself, or with a sympathetic friend. In such a case we prepare for the celestial joy differently. Oysters and stout are not in the programme, perhaps a shred of salmi with an anchovy will be substituted as the *hors d'œuvre*, and so we proceed by slow degrees through the evening, until by the time we reach our cigar and coffee, with cognac, we have completed the circle of preparation for delight and can say amen."

"But afterwards, when the decanter comes on?" enquired Timothy, greatly interested.

"There is no afterwards as far as decanters are concerned. We have entered the gates of paradise, and leave mundane affairs behind us, our souls are uplifted, we are with the blest, there is no poverty, no duns, no sorrows where we have entered, and no base desires, only the calmness and joys of the contented."

"But what would you do in a case like the present —with a dinner like this, if you wanted to go to bed sober?" inquired the gastronomic disciple, Timothy, earnestly.

"With such a dinner as this," replied the Captain, gravely, "I should do exactly as I have already done to-day—visit the kitchen, and interview the cook, flatter her, and make myself agreeable and discover her best points, then after winning her confidence, I should adroitly manage her so that my delicately-covered suggestions should appear to be inspirations of her own, and so, as I have succeeded to-day, I would have the right condiments, and the correct arrangement of dishes that I require, in order to be

able to sit with you to-night, my dear friend Timothy, and sample our generous host's fine, old, three-star cognac."

"Ah! then, this dinner is all right, if you have looked after it, Wildrake, and we can drink afterwards with impunity," said Timothy in a gratified tone.

"The dinner is all right, friend Timothy, and scientifically arranged, as far as it can be, with the materials we had at our command, for Mrs. Bridget Brannigan, the cook, is a lady of quick wit, like the rest of her charming countrywomen, and *I* shall be able to drink with impunity to-night, for I have followed the courses so far with great care, but—as I have observed—*you* have been absent-minded, and passed over what was most important, and therefore I fear, if you desire to keep sober to-night, that you must be sparing with the decanter."

Helen at another time would have laughed at the palpable vexation which was now so plainly depicted in the features of her uncle, but although she was listening as intently as Timothy himself to the Captain's discourse, she did not even smile, but kept her dark eyes fixed steadfastly upon the face of the Captain.

"Sure, I have partaken of the dishes as they were placed before me, have I not, Wildrake?" asked Timothy, anxiously.

"As you usually do, perhaps," replied this gastronomic adept serenely, "but not as you ought to have done, if your ambition was to be able to walk straight to your bedroom to-night."

"What ought I to have done?"

'Well, we began with tomato soup, which is a

bulwark in itself against the heady effects of alcohol; now, I was helped twice to this soup, while you hardly swallowed a spoonful."

"But that is a soup I detest!" groaned poor Timothy.

"There you are, you see, allowing your inclinations to interfere with your interests, which I never do under any circumstances."

"And what was my next mistake?"

"You have been committing mistakes all through up to the present! You took brandy and water before you began to eat at all——"

"Just a flavour of it as an appetizer," murmured poor Timothy, hastily and apologetically.

"Exactly. It did for you what the soup did for me, only in the wrong way as far as your hopes for to-night are concerned; again, I have observed that you like your fish fried, while I persuaded the cook to let us have them boiled instead, with anchovy sauce—why? because the fish is easier to digest when that way cooked, and I did not wish to swallow any grease at this stage; I suggested anchovy sauce because the soup had given us acid enough for our purpose already, and we now wanted a briny irritant to enable us to tackle enough of the under-done joint, which I was delighted to find had been killed and cut about half-an-hour before being cooked and before it had time to get chilled, therefore, I knew that it would be tender, full-flavoured and succulent; now, you treated the fish as you did the soup, again replenishing your glass, and what was more heinous, you took potatoes."

"I am fond of potatoes," said Timothy.

"So am I, when it is safe to indulge in them; we are now at the roast stage, are you enjoying it?"

"Not so much as I'd like to do," answered Timothy.

"Look at my plate and yours at this moment," continued the Captain calmly. "You have cabbage and potatoes, swamped in gravy again beside your beef, I have the beef only, and no vegetables, and no gravy; you are taking piquant sauce also amongst the gravy, I am satisfied with the flavour of this delicious and under-done cut, with a little of Bridget's home-baked loaf; therefore, in regard to the solids we stand thus—you have messed both soup and fish, and are poisoning the third course, I have had soup twice, fish twice, and intend to eat as much of the beef now as I possibly can do; probably you think of taking sweets and fruit after this, while I shall be contented with a small piece of cheese. Now, with regard to the fluids, you have stuck, with a devotion worthy of a better cause, to the brandy, and possibly will take coffee to finish up. I took no liquid before my soup, only half a glass of sherry with my fish, I am taking claret with my beef, and will wind up with half a glass of cognac afterwards. You see, friend Timothy, it is all a system of contrasts, acid with the soup, salt and warmth with the fish to intensify its brain-feeding and blotting-paper qualities; and again the cooling claret to soothe and modify the heat-producing flesh, afterwards that half glass of cognac will just sufficiently arrest the waste and rapidity of digestion to prevent me requiring any more food until I bid you all good-night."

"Faith, but I'll take an example by you, Wildrake, and begin my dinner over again!" cried Timothy

getting upon his feet in his excitement; when the Captain arrested him with a wave of his hand.

"When one has taken two such important steps in the wrong direction, friend Timothy, as you have done to-day, it is impossible to go back and begin again; the best way is to go on to the bitter and inevitable end."

"I think not," said Helen quickly, seeing his black eyes wander towards her for an instant, and fancying there was a double meaning in his words. "One may always repent, and try as far as possible to repair the wrong done."

"Exactly, Miss Craven," murmured Wildrake softly. "Sometimes one may escape the consequences of a mistake by resistance; my friend Timothy may do that if he can, and eschew the decanter to-night."

"Sure, but I have no wish to do this, if I can help it at all," cried Uncle Timothy savagely.

"Then the next thing we have to consider is how far we can help you to evade the consequences. I have a pick-me-up of my own invention, which I can give you, that will prevent the brandy from overcoming you, if you wish to go to bed sober to-night, only the after effects will be a bad headache to-morrow."

"Never mind to-morrow, keep me right to-night and I'll risk to-morrow," said Uncle Timothy, eagerly, and then added, "I have something to do to-night, some letters and that sort of thing to write for the mail after I leave you, Wildrake, and I don't want to miss the pleasure of your company, while as for to-morrow, I'll take the headache and it together, and consider to-night worth a dozen to-morrows."

"Spoken like a true Irish gentleman," replied

Captain Wildrake with a smile. "Very well, eat what you like and I'll fix you up as you wish."

After this the dinner passed off without much further talk, the Captain keeping to his rigid rules, while Helen remained quietly attentive, and poor old Timothy poured out the brandy with his trembling hand and trifled with the dishes; then at last they all rose from the table to take their seats in the verandah when Helen said to the Captain:

"I like the smell of cigars, Captain Wildrake, will you walk with me in the garden while you take your smoke?"

"With pleasure, Miss Craven," replied Wildrake, springing to her side with alacrity.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### HELEN DISCOVERS SOMETHING.

If Helen Craven, in her innocence, thought that she would be able to draw anything out of Captain Wildrake that he did not wish to divulge, the next half-hour convinced her of her mistake.

She urged him to light his cigar, and then led him away from the verandah where her father, mother, and Uncle Timothy sat, down the garden walk, pretty much as she had led Percy so often before, but with a very different purpose in her mind. She was struggling to be calm and indifferent-looking, with a great horror chilling her young heart; for this strange and sudden vanishing of Percy seemed to suggest a tragic mystery, of which this awful man held the key.

She had read all about the Romans in their latter days of cruelty and refinement, and this man appeared

to her capable of the most atrocious crimes; his varied accomplishments and gentleness of manner did not reassure her, neither did his enthusiasm on the art of eating appear to her any longer a subject to smile about, they had all been characteristics of the olden monsters, who with their vices and tiger-like cruelties brought their country to such ruin; and now, as he walked beside her, with light step and musical voice, she seemed to be transported to another age, when men dressed in soft robes and bedecked like women, indulged in perfumed baths and fragrant ointments, made their bodies sleek and beautiful, while they had all the instincts of savage beasts.

Captain Wildrake was particular about his dress and person, and much addicted to perfumes, a daintiness and foppery which she had been inclined to laugh at at first, but which no longer inspired her with aught except fear, for although these might be signs of weakness in other men, there was no weakness about that iron jaw, those inscrutable black eyes, or those carefully-tended but sinewy hands. Nero might have had his moments of relenting, but she felt sure that this nineteenth-century Epicurean never had, and yet she hoped that her girlish cunning and love-inspired craft might outwit him in his purpose.

The darkness had come upon them while they were at dinner, and only the stars now blazed about, with the phosphorescent mirages on the distant plain, for the days and nights were pretty equally divided in this latitude.

She was glad of the darkness, for he would not be able to read in her face the shrinking horror she felt for him, glad also that she could not see the glances

of admiration which, in daylight, he would have given her, had she walked with him then. He admired her, yes, as Nero might have admired a new slave, whom he had not yet secured, for although he was always respectful in his language, she was woman enough to know the meaning of those lurid glances, and hate him for them.

She took him slowly down the garden path, to where they had a clear view of those dimly-burning mirages; by day they were trees and lakes, but in the dark they were stretches of blue fire.

"Wonderful sight that is, Miss Craven, isn't it?" remarked the Captain as they paused at the gate and ooked out upon the plain.

"Yes" replied Helen, and then, wishing to drive to her point, she added: "Mr. Shafton rode home with you last night, I think you said?"

"Oh, yes, he stayed with me all night, and left at daybreak this morning."

"It was a very sudden resolution."

"Not so sudden; he has been meditating this for some weeks, in fact he spoke about it to me on my first day at Turro-side, only I did my best to persuade him against the idea. He was always a strange fellow for taking queer notions into his head and it's an old habit of his to go off without saying good-bye —he seems to hate leave-takings, always afraid that if he tells people he is going, *they might prevent it;* he is a little weak that way, I'll admit, although he doesn't mean to hurt people's feelings, I am sure."

"So am I," replied Helen, quietly. "Yet he told you about it soon enough."

"Oh, I'm different, we are such old friends; besides,

I daresay he wouldn't have told me either, if he hadn't wanted me to look after his affairs during his absence."

"His man has gone with him?"

"Only as far as the exploring party, after that he is coming back to join my company of rangers. Shafton doesn't want a valet in the bush; ridiculous idea, isn't it, for the like of him, with such an income, going away on an exploring expedition? They are sure to suffer no end of privations, even if they *get back alive.*"

Helen gasped for a moment and felt as if she was going to faint, but she crushed down the weakness and continued:

"Do you know where he is going?"

"North—north; their destination is Cambridge Gulf, he intends to write a book, I believe, and this is a private enterprize, and, I understand from him, well provided; he had arranged with these fellows about this in Melbourne, he told me, and that was why he sent his man to meet them."

"Then he always intended to leave us?"

"It seems like it, doesn't it, Miss Craven? Wonderful reticent fellow Shafton is; he always was about his own intentions; not the least like me in disposition, for I am always giving myself away."

"Thank you, Captain Wildrake. You have been very kind to tell me all about your friend, so I'll not keep you any longer from Uncle Timothy and the decanter; poor old man, he must be nearly ready for your tonic."

And Helen without waiting upon him to accompany her, glided up the garden walk, leaving him still by the gate.

He did not move for a moment after she had left him, but stood looking after her, as he murmured:

"Wants to get rid of me, after fishing all she could, artful, artless little kitten that she is. Heart a bit sore at the duplicity of Percy to-night, and now goes off to have a few tears in her bedroom. Well, my dear, go and have it out that way as soon as possible, and then my turn will come, I'm not in a great hurry—what a graceful walk she has. Gad! if I don't be careful I'll get to like her for herself, and then it's all up with my digestion as well as my calculations."

"Captain," said a low voice, while a figure appeared at the other side of the gate.

"Hallo, Hickey, got back?"

"Yes, it's all right."

"Then go down to the barracks, and keep yourself dark for a day or two—or no, best hang about for a bit here, I may want you at the house to-night."

"Anything on?"

"Nothing much, only I may want you as a witness. Old Timothy is up to something which I want us to grab him at, so that he may be in our hands for future use, only don't show yourself. I'll come down here after I leave the station and pick you up—have you had supper?"

"No," replied Hickey, otherwise James H. Black.

"That's bad, Hickey, I hope you are not growing careless about your grub?" said the Captain with real anxiety.

"Not much blooming fear of any of your boys growing careless in that way, but I can easily hang on for an hour or two," replied Hickey with a laugh.

"That's right, I'll see that you have something

when I meet you; meanwhile, here's my flask and some cigars, only don't smoke near the house."

"Right you are, boss, ta, ta!"

While the valet melted into the darkness, the Captain strolled leisurely up to the house and joined the company there, which, as he had surmised, was without the presence of Helen, and when, shortly afterwards, Mr. and Mrs. Craven also retired, he went indoors with Timothy to discuss the customary night caps.

Helen walked straight from the gate to her own bedroom, and then, after she had closed her door and turned up her lamp, she took from her pocket the farewell letter of Percy Shafton, and read it once again over carefully; this done, she took from her desk a little birthday book and turned over the pages until she came to the name of Percy Shafton in it, and after a glance there she shut the book triumphantly, and tossing the letter on the floor, stamped upon it disdainfully.

"My darling, whoever he may be, never wrote that foolish, cold-blooded letter. Ah! Captain Wildrake, you liar and scoundrel, I'll find you out yet, and what you have done with my own love."

The signature in that little book was the only specimen she had of the absent one's hand-writings. She remembered how unwilling he had been to accede to her request to put down his name in this book, and how at last she had persuaded him, and stood over him while he wrote it. She had not thought at the time anything about the difference of caligraphy from the old letters that they had received, it was only when she received that last letter that she

remembered. But now her mind was at rest, this Percy was not the former Percy at all, and that was the secret which had made him so miserable when beside her.

That was all, and she did not care for that now, although she might have done so a few weeks ago, for whoever he was, she loved him and he loved her, and she now knew that he had gone away for the sake of that love, that is, *if he had gone of his own free will.*

Had he gone of his own free will? Yes, she owned to herself that this was likely enough; he was too noble-minded to be able to endure the forced deception any longer, he had given her up rather than accept the love she had given to him under that false character; gone alone into the wilds to battle with his misery and leave her free, that is, if this Wildrake had not killed him, out of fear lest he should betray him.

She knew now that her lover had been acting a hateful part, as this tyrant of his was also doing, and that she ought to go at once to her father and reveal what she had learnt, or else become the accomplice of both men, and allow this impostor to rob the man whom her lover had represented himself to be for his sake.

It was a hard position to be forced upon a girl who had hitherto been trained to love truth and honour, but love seemed to have changed her manner of looking at these principles—they were right, doubtless, but oh, love was the best.

She thought upon the light which had thrilled her from his eyes in the cave, and on the wild words she had listened to last night, as she crouched under the open window when he was telling this Wildrake about

his passion and his innocence; and the sacrifice of truth and honour seemed little when compared to the joy which that last confession had given her.

All at once she walked to the window, and raising it, kneeled on the carpet and looked out at the bright stars which were shining down upon her, while she murmured passionately:

"Oh, my darling, my injured, suffering martyr, where are you—where are you? Can I not suffer something for you, who have suffered so much? My darling—my own true love!"

There are distinct types amongst men as there are in animals of different species, and the most perfect of humanity is that which unites in the one personality each of the qualities which define the different species of animals, of whom man is the most complete. In his animalism man should eclipse the lion for courage, the tiger for fierceness, the serpent for subtlety, the fox for cunning, the lamb for meekness and the horse for docility, with the dog for fidelity.

Yet all these qualities, which go to make a perfect animal, must be dominated and held under control by the spirit which has made him the king of creation, the spirit of love and divine charity, and this is the difference between sanity and insanity—the maniac is an animal pure and simple; remorseless, relentless and soulless, gloating and delighting in his strength, his cunning or his rapacity, he is an animal with his soul-chamber empty, or if tenanted at all, then this chamber is occupied by the "*spooks*" and "*wills*" of departed maniacs, while the soul that was given to him lies chained and trampled under these demon

invaders. The sane man is the one whose soul is active and watchfully guarding its citadel, and controlling without crushing those passions which help to make him great.

Thus the study of man is one of the most subtle that a student can take up. If he is hasty in his judgment he will be sure to make an error, because having taken a type to represent a vice, or a virtue; he will overlook some detail which redeems and lifts the individual from the type to which he seems to belong. Men run in classes of course; the head of the self-indulgent will take a form which will be unmistakable, it will be egg-shaped with the widest dimensions in the middle, and features will have nothing more to do with this than as indicators of the resolution or habits of the individual. Socrates had the features of a gross debauchee, but his head was not egg-shaped, therefore his features were indicators only of what his habits might have been had his moral nature been less developed.

Captain Wildrake was a remarkably handsome man, with features of the most noble and heroic cast; a fine blending of the stern Roman and classical Greek, but like so many of those heads which we have of the notabilities of the Roman race in their decline, it was unmistakably egg-shaped.

Seen in profile it was almost perfect, a straight but low and receding forehead, a nose massive and also straight, eyes full with the eyelids sharply defined, well-formed lips, the upper one curved and the lower full and dewy, and the chin, as I have said, prominent, pointed and denoting iron resolution; it was the termination of the egg.

These lips, however, were unmistakable, he might be a hero in moments of urgency, but in hours of relaxation, he could not avoid being a gastronome, for his whole soul trembled upon his lower lip; it was always moist and rose-red, with a sensitiveness that seemed almost a tenderness.

Uncle Timothy had a tremulous lower lip also, but it was as different from the lip of Wildrake as is the lip of a libertine from that of an ascetic.

Wildrake despised Uncle Timothy as much as a true artist could despise a man who had no soul for art, yet he could no more avoid helping uncle Timothy on this night to overcome his infirmity than a true painter could pause when requested to touch up the daub of a novice; therefore when the pair said good-night, after the decanter was empty, thanks to that original tonic, Uncle Timothy for the first time during the past four years, walked straight to his bedroom, was able to unlace his boots, and place his candle for himself on the mantelshelf; feats which had been impossibilities to him before for many years.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A FASHIONABLE YOUNG MAN'S WARDROBE.

TIMOTHY was much soberer than he had been for a long time at eleven o'clock that night, but he was not quite so *compos mentis* as he would have liked to be, for the enterprise which he had in hand.

The "pick-me-up" that the Captain gave him was a powerful one and acted like the magical draught of Mephistopheles on the aged Faust, it ran through his veins like the vigour of youth, and mounting to his

well-nigh softened brains, counteracted the stupefying brandy fumes and rendered him for a time impervious to the charm of the seducer.

But the worst of it was, he required the tonic before he had taken what he considered enough for his stomach's sake, and it was of too dangerous a nature to repeat the dose in one night; it had sobered him certainly for the time, but it also seemed to have created a fresh thirst and desire to apply once again to the decanter, a desire which Uncle Timothy could no more resist, while a drop remained, than he could avoid boasting about his kingly ancestors and the despicable degradation of work. He was a very staunch Tory was uncle Timothy, who upheld the inviolable rights of pedigree and landlordism; the game laws to him were as holy as the State Church, while burning alive he regarded as a mild punishment for the proletarian who raised his voice against these olden and sacred institutions; indeed a proletarian meant in his rigid mind, exactly what the great lexicographer wrote it down, "one of the commonalty: hence—mean, vile, vulgar, base," as a patrician meant a person of high birth, noble, who could not do wrong, or be mean, vile, vulgar or base.

Of course he had to own to his drink-swamped conscience that the enterprise he was meditating belonged rather to the proletarian order than it did to the patrician class, according to the meaning attached to these different grades of society by the dictionary, but still he comforted himself that the peculiar circumstances altered the case entirely; as a member of the privileged order he had always been accustomed to fine clothes and good cigars, *when he could get them*,

as his ancestors had been before him, without enquiring too closely how these comforts were procured; they were like the game, the natural privilege and rights of his kind, whereas proletarians were not accustomed to either game, good cigars or fine clothing, unless they became criminals and stole them, and it was quite right that such a criminal, when caught, should be imprisoned or hanged, as the state of the laws might be; therefore, what would be a case of mean and vulgar theft in one of the commonalty, was no more in his case, poor gentleman, than if he was to take his gun and shoot over the premises of one of his friends during his absence, for, of course, if Percy Sharton had not been such a selfish dog, he ought to have made him free of his wardrobe during his absence, according to the holy code of *noblesse oblige*.

That pick-me-up was a *chef d'œuvre*, which the Captain had given him, for it enabled him to drink more than twice his usual quantity and yet walk steadily with his friend to the door, see him mount and ride away, and after this it had carried him, or rather allowed his own legs to carry him along the wide passage to his own room without more than a slight lurch to right and left, as it enabled him to insert the key into his watch-hole at the first attempt without making a scratch, although another scratch now would not have mattered on that much-scored surface.

"Sober as a judge," he muttered to himself in a surprised tone as he stood in the centre of his room and looked about him so as to test the matter fairly, before venturing forth; he had taken off his coat,

vest, collar and tie, also his creaking borrowed boots, and was now prepared for the task.

"Faith, and I believe that a few more glasses would only have steadied me instead of hurting me, as Wildrake feared, yet maybe it's as well to stop on the safe side of discretion."

He stretched himself up to his full height and struck his meagre chest lightly and then passed his skinny hand over his forehead and eyes.

"Sober, as far as my legs are concerned, I am sure, but a trifle muddly in the upper regions, with the stooping over my boots, I expect. Well, a good dip in the basin will cure that, so here goes."

He was a tall gentleman, although he stooped a good deal generally, and attenuated; aristocratically slender, he himself termed his figure; an elderly patrician ought never to run to fat, for that is the mark of successful and vulgar proletarianism, therefore his body was long and excessively spare in flesh, with large bones, hollow chest and rounded back, while his head, prematurely bald, was as small as that of an Aztec, the oldest and purest of all human races.

He had a fine vulture-like nose, however, which stood out boldly from the narrow little brow and diminutive chin, with a pair of masterly ears to balance the nose, all lavishly coloured and scarlet-veined; his eyes were of the lobster pattern, projecting, blood-shot, and aristocratically near-sighted, so that he had to wear glasses constantly, which added to his patrician appearance, and as that proboscis had a bridge specially designed to carry eye-glasses, it would have been rather a misfortune than otherwise if he had

not been short-sighted; in his shirt-sleeves and trousers only he did not, of course, look quite so much in character as when fully costumed, yet even in this state no one could have insulted him by mistaking him for a working-bee in the human hive, for he bore about him all the characteristics of the drone.

Filling the basin with water, he rolled up his cuffs and turning down his shirt at the neck, plunged his small, fiery-tinted head into the cooling fluid, using the sponge to drench the back part while the front was immersed, then after a few minutes of this cooling process he raised himself again, feeling greatly refreshed.

"That, with the pick-me-up, ought to carry me safely through this night's work," he murmured as he dried his steaming head with the towel.

"Work." He spat on the straw-matting in his disgust at the vulgar word, and felt savage at the want of consideration of Shafton forcing him to degrade himself in this manner. Work! bah! that a Craven should have to do it, it was disgusting and positively brutal on the part of this selfish Shafton, forcing a middle-aged gentleman in his shirt and stockings to creep about in the night like a common housebreaker.

Yet it had to be done, and done at once, while his brother's household slept, therefore with a few gentlemanly curses at the absent man for his gross want of consideration, Timothy took up the match-box and candle, after blowing out the light, and opening his bedroom door, stole out as softly as he could with those dried-up and crackling joints of his.

The night was almost airless and extremely sultry, so that all the windows had been left open, therefore, the numerous sounds from the bush could be

plainly heard, the concert of the frogs in the dried swamps, the distant bells on the cattle, with the other distinctive voices of the night all blending into a harmony that wafted in and covered the crackling of those bones and the shambling footsteps of this amateur burglar.

He had only a short distance to go, before reaching the door he wanted, past two empty bedrooms, and away from where his relations and the servants slept, so that he did not anticipate any interruption, yet these outside noises forced him to stop one or twice, while the crackling of his own joints, the rustling of his shirt sleeves along the wall, as he cautiously felt his way, and that humming in his head, (for it was beginning to hum strangely and ache horribly), made his timid heart thrill and throb with fear, and his shaken nerves to tingle, while his throat grew as dry as deadwood, and his breath came out in gasps and snorts.

He was trembling as if with the ague, his knees so weak that they threatened to double under him as he stumbled blindly on in the dark with the hungry mosquitoes dashing against his face, rings and sparks of fire flashed before his eyes, until it seemed as if he was surrounded with countless cats all glaring at him from the blackness.

Once or twice when he paused faint and sick with fear, he thought it would be best to give up his project and return to his own room, but even as he made the backward step came the tempting vision of the luxuries he must in that case forego, and he nerved himself up again to the effort. But it was an awful strain, and he could not help thinking, if this

was what an ordinary housebreaker had to endure, then the game was hardly worth the suffering and risk.

At last he reached the door he wanted, and opening it softly, entered, and closed it again, then after a careful look round and a moment or so of intent listening, during which his big ears twitched painfully, he re-lighted the candle and set it on the dressing-table.

He had only been a few seconds on his way from the one bedroom to the other, but to him it appeared a very long nightmare.

"Gad, I could swallow a bucket of brandy at this moment without quenching my thirst or steadying my nerves."

His brains (such as they were) burned and throbbed now as if they would have burst their skullpan, the after effects of the sobering potion were beginning with a vengeance, he rolled his tongue about his dry mouth vainly for moisture, then desperately he seized an ewer and drank deeply the stale water with which it was filled; it had not been changed since Percy had left and now tasted sickly and warm, but Timothy could have swallowed soap-suds at this moment.

He felt better for a little after that draught, and when he had wet the sponge and held it to the top of his head, the blindness began to leave him, then he saw that the French windows were open, and staggering across the room he closed them, also the venetian blinds, and locking the door he considered that the worst was over, at least until the return journey had to be made, for no one could see him, or the light through those closed venetians, or interrupt him.

There was a large wardrobe in the room and several travelling cases; the wardrobe Timothy did not trouble himself to look into, as only a lady would be likely to make use of that; the cases were what fascinated him and drew him with his candle towards.

They were unlocked, therefore, the contents were quickly exposed to view, shirts by the gross in all the fashionable shades and patterns, neckties, handkerchiefs and silk socks lay side by side, each carefully matched as only a Piccadilly young man, or an elderly bachelor like the refined uncle Timothy, would think needful; they made a gorgeous and soul-entrancing display, over which this noble but poor gentleman gloated, while he sighed because he could not take away the complete set.

Trousers, vests and coats of the latest and most fashionable cut were fished from these roomy recesses and laid upon the floor for after selection; boots, shoes and gaiters were ranged like a procession along two sides of the room, while in the little drawers, nestled studs, links and pins of different designs and stones to suit the varied shades of shirts and neckties.

Timothy diligently dived to the bottom of each trunk, fishing up some curios which interested him not a little as he glanced over them, locks of hair, like the neckties, in all shades, odd female shoes and slippers, several pairs of stays, only one pair of these, however, were such as are used by the fair sex, the others were — alas! for male vanity, that I must expose it here—of the masculine gender in corsets, and these Timothy eyed with grave and critical interest.

"Faith! and the boy wasn't such a fool after all.

Who'd have expected it of him?" muttered Timothy as he laid these articles aside for a future examination, while he continued his search.

There were bundles of photographs mounted and unmounted, of actresses the mounted ones were, all of which interested this patrician so greatly that he wasted a considerable amount of his precious time goggling at them through his eyeglasses, and huskily chuckling over them, but at last he put them aside and went on with more serious business.

Eight boxes of cigars lay unbroken in one of the departments, and of these he laid aside six to be removed to his own room; there were also several pound cases of fine tobacco which he also divided in the same *conscientious manner* and placed beside the cigars.

Of pipes and cigar-holders there was a great assortment, which took him some time to divide; however at length he completed this task also, with a covetous and lingering glance at those which he thought it prudent to leave behind.

One small drawer he opened, looked at for a moment greedily and then shut hastily; it was filled with sovereigns. After he had done this he sat on the edge of the box for a long time with his lobster eyes fixed moodily on the ground; at last he roused himself with a vigorous shake of his head, and a heavy groan.

"No! that *might* be considered stealing, I'll leave *them* alone."

After a long and weary time, with many turnings over and reconsiderations, he selected ten of the complete suits, with appropriate neckties, handkerchiefs, socks and shirts; these he laid aside, after

which he replaced the remainder as carefully as he could fold them.

"They'll be devoured by moths for certain long before he gets them, and beside will be out of date. but I suppose I must leave them," he murmured regretfully as he turned to the trinkets, and over these he held another judicial conversation with his imaginary jury.

"A gentleman may borrow a suit of clothes or a shirt from a friend without in any way losing his innate dignity or self-respect; he can also borrow a gun, or a walking-stick, a pipe and a cigar-case, therefore why shouldn't he be able to borrow a few pins, rings and sleeve-links? It's not customary, I'll admit, yet in an exceptional case like the present, why not?"

Timothy had put this nice point to his imaginary jury, and they, being entirely of his way of thinking, decided in his favour, for next moment he was making his selection—a lavish one, and had them also rolled up in a piece of newspaper and safely stuffed into his trousers pocket.

Another long pause took place after this, and then he hesitatingly re-opened the drawer which held the golden coins.

He gazed at them for a considerable time doubtfully, and then slowly began to lift them out and count them, letting them drop one by one into their places.

"Three hundred and fifteen sovereigns lying idle for God knows how long, or rather lying a snare and a temptation to the servants," murmured Timothy. "It's positively sinful on Shafton's part to leave the like of these lying loosely like this, and

any man in my position would consider it only his duty to take care of them—it's not borrowing, it's a duty and a sacred trust."

Timothy's jury must have once more decided in his favour, for with a quick grasp he clutched up two hands filled and thrust into his pockets—when, like the crack of doom, a soft voice, which even in his mortal terror, he recognised as Captain Wildrake's, said:

"I think not, my poor friend Timothy. As you say, a gentleman might on a pinch borrow a pair of trousers or a coat from his absent friend, but to bone his jewellery and cash in this surreptitious fashion, is, to speak in the most indulgent terms, brazen bush-ranging."

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## CHAPTER X.

### SOLD.

ABJECT and proletarian terror in its strictest dictionary meaning could alone express the next attitude and expression of Timothy Craven as he heard these soft accents rolled out on that quiet midnight air.

He had been sitting on the edge of the expensively got-up travelling chest of the Hon. Percy Shafton, after his first successful dive into his dimes, and was taking his two second fistfuls, when the words fell upon his startled ears; indeed he had raised both hands from the compartment preparatory to putting them in his pockets, but at the fell words he flopped upon his weak knees by the side of the box, while his paralysed hands relaxed their hold on the gold, which scattered in a yellow shower round him as he half-

turned, to see Captain Wildrake sitting upon the absentee's bed, while the valet, James H. Black, stood just as he had emerged from the wardrobe.

"No, it will not do, Timothy, my poor friend; with those pockets filled with loot, *and this witness*, I fear it will be my duty as superintendent of the Turroside police to take you in charge as a common and vulgar thief, no matter how much I love you."

He was gazing more in sorrow than in anger on this sadly fallen and seedy patrician; sitting on the edge of the bed and swinging one leg quietly as he struck the calf of the other leg lightly with his riding whip, while James, the valet, looked from his alcove as outraged as a valet could look who sees a stranger pilfering his master's wardrobe

"Mercy, mercy, Wildrake," cried the miserable Timothy in a shrill and cracked voice.

"Inspector Wildrake I am to you, criminal," interrupted the Captain sternly.

"I can explain all this to your entire satisfaction."

"You need not explain to me at all, prisoner, indeed in my official capacity I must formally warn you not to commit yourself in any way; reserve your evidence, is my advice."

"But, Wildrake——"

"Inspector, if you please, sir."

"Well, then, Inspector, surely you are joking with me?"

"I am afraid you will find it rather a tough joke to digest before you are done with it, Mr. Timothy Craven. Listen to the case from my point and you will own this for yourself. I am entertained in the house of your brother, who, as magistrate of this part, is my

chief; after riding a little distance I remember that I forgot to ask Mr. Craven about the keys of these chests which have been placed under my charge, therefore I turn back, to meet this honest servant, who informs me that there is something, suspicious, taking place within the house, so together we creep along the verandah to find this window open. Next moment a man enters and strikes a light; we immediately follow to watch his little game, and conceal ourselves in the wardrobe while he is licking in at the ewer; we see him fasten the window and lock the door, and then proceed to empty the boxes."

Timothy, as he now crouched on the floor, tries to put in a word at this point, but the Captain goes on pitilessly:

"Hold on a bit until I am done. We watch him set aside certain articles which we naturally suppose he has come to steal, but of that we want to make sure, and for the time give him the benefit of the doubt; then we see him take out some articles of jewellery and pocket them, which is almost enough for our purpose, but when he begins also to make the yellow boys go the same road, there is no longer room for even the most credulous of policemen to entertain a doubt as to the nefarious intentions of that midnight prowler."

"But you knew me surely—also that I——"

"We have no right to know you, otherwise than for the purpose of identifying you in case you made your escape from us, which I don't think you will be foolish enough to try on."

Timothy glared about him like a wild and half-starved cat that had been driven into a corner, while

the Captain and the servant watched him silently; at last he said humbly and hopelessly:

"If I put all the things back as I found them I suppose you'll let me go, and say nothing about this mistake?"

"How can we do so, Mr. Timothy Craven? Have we not caught you red-handed, in the very act, and are you not aware that if we winked at your escape we are regarded in the eyes of the law as your accomplices?"

"But such little evasions are managed every day," replied poor Timothy with a feeble attempt at a wink, wincing even as he did this at the stinging words of his captor.

"I have heard so," said the Captain gravely, "but honest men do not make themselves the accomplices of thieves *for nothing*, therefore why should we do so in this case?"

"It's for friendship—holy friendship—you'd be doing it."

The Captain shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"For my brother's sake. Surely you wouldn't disgrace the family to whom you owe your present position under Government?" again urged Timothy. "Be merciful, Captain Wildrake, if not for friendship yet for the sake of my brother with his wife and daughter."

"I would do a great deal for Mr. and Mrs. Craven, and much more for Miss Craven, but this, Timothy, is impossible, for see there is another witness to square, and I doubt if he cares much for the family honour."

"Not a blessed fig of tobacco," replied the valet promptly. "If I shut my mouth it must be for something a good deal more substantial, and what have

ye got to offer *me*, supposing the Captain there consents?"

Timothy glanced at Wildrake, who shook his head sadly.

"Have you any money of your own, or the means of laying your hands on any?" asked James H. Black coarsely.

"Only these," replied Timothy plaintively, putting his hands into his pockets.

"Which belong to me, as trustee for my absent friend," said the Captain.

"I might give you a bill at six months' date," began Timothy, when the valet broke into a hoarse laugh.

"Bill be blowed. Can't you manage to get into your brother's safe, and loot it, or get *him* to draw you a cheque?—that would be more like business."

Timothy looked up with a startled glance to find the Captain was not at all horrified at this suggestion, indeed he took up the conversation where the other had left it off.

"Black is right from his way of looking at it, Timothy, for supposing that we become your accomplices in this attempted robbery, which places us so far in *your* power, we must both have a guarantee on your side of good faith, merely as a guarantee you know, so that you may be in our power also."

"What do you want me to do?" asked the trapped gentleman in a low voice.

"Break open the safe and bring the contents to us, signing a confession in our presence that you did the 'crack,' and feel it weighing on your conscience."

"No, Hickey—I mean Black, that would not do, for it would be found out in a few days' time, when the

squatter pays off his extra hands; I must think of something easier and safer for my poor friend."

The Captain sprang to his feet and took three or four turns up and down the room as if thinking out a plan, and then he stopped opposite Timothy and asked:

"I suppose you cannot persuade your brother to write you out a cheque for a good round sum? For, of course, to compound a felony requires something handsome."

"He wouldn't trust me with more than ten shillings at a time," replied Timothy, with the awakened hope dying out of his face.

"Ah, then I suppose that settles it?" said the Captain with a sigh.

"Of course it does, sir. What's the good of trying to screen this old sinner, and wasting the night like this? Just let's rouse up the magistrate and get him to commit the thief to prison and then we'll be off with him."

"No, no, for God's sake, anything but that exposure," sobbed poor Timothy. "Think upon some other way, Wildrake; tell me something I can do to escape this horrid disgrace."

"Yes, Black, hold on a moment till I think of something that will be a guarantee. Ha! I have it. Are you well acquainted with your brother's signature?"

"As well as with my own almost," replied Timothy.

"And can you imitate it, do you think?"

"Yes, there is a family likeness about our handwriting, but what of that?"

"This, you shall get a blank cheque of your brother's and make it payable to yourself, signing his name on

the face and your own on the back; you can leave the amount blank as it won't be presented while you are discreet about this night, as far as we are concerned, as I think you will be while I hold that forged cheque."

"But this will mean transportation to me," gasped Timothy, standing up with horror.

"So does what you carry in your pockets, therefore you must decide at once if you want us to compound this felony."

"But where do I come in?" asked the valet in a surly tone.

"I'll settle that with you myself after we get this business off our hands. Well, Timothy, what is it to be, bed or prison?"

"I'll give you that cheque?"

"That's all right, now we have become accomplices and can shake hands. Meantime as you have had a trying night, I'll strain a point and let you have, on loan from my absent friend, ten sovereigns, two complete suits with shirts, etc., to match, a pound tin of his tobacco and a box of these cigars, while in return you give me an acknowledgment for the amount, say at twelve months' date, which that cheque is supposed to repay. Does this appear fair to you?"

"Yes," said Timothy, "come into my room, where I have pens, ink and paper, and I'll write you out that acknowledgment."

"With a confession of this night's *mistake* for me to hold until you get me the cheque."

"I'll do that also," grumbled Timothy, somewhat ungraciously, for now that the immediate danger seemed to be over, he was recovering from his fear and beginning to feel a very injured gentleman.

"Your conditions are very hard ones, Captain Wildrake."

"I have my security to think about as you have yours, Mr. Timothy Craven, and in such cases as this, written bonds are more satisfactory than verbal promises."

Timothy quailed at the stern tone in which these words were uttered, and said no more, but turned to pick out two from the ten suits he had laid aside. This done, the Captain turned to the ex-valet, and said sharply:

"Now, Black, while Mr. Craven is putting back those trinkets and the loose coins which are at present in his pocket, fold up the clothes and place them in their usual order, for I must lock up my friend's boxes before we go to-night."

Timothy once more plunged his hands into his pockets and restored the contents to the different drawers, while the Captain stood watching him, then he bent down and gathered up the gold that had been scattered over the matting, and by the time this task was finished James H. Black had the boxes in their former state of order and ready for locking.

"Now, observe, Black, I take ten sovereigns from this store as a loan for Mr. Craven, the rest are as my friend, your former master, left them."

"I see, Captain."

"Now they are locked and safe until I can send for them, take up that box of cigars and those other borrowed articles, and carry them for Mr. Craven to his bedroom."

It was considerably after two o'clock in the morning before these two accomplices of the

miserable Timothy parted from him, and left him to lay down his throbbing head on his pillow, free to do this as he was at liberty to wear those dearly-purchased suits, but feeling in other points as if he had at last sold himself to the devil for a paltry ten pounds and a few sundries such as the devils of Hebrew money-lenders generally plant on their victims.

He had written and signed the confession and acknowledgment, which the Captain had carried with him, and now must scheme and plot to get at his brother's cheque-book, without the visit being suspected, and put himself still further in his master's hands, and what had he got for his share of the bargain? Nothing at all, hardly, to recompense him for the anxiety and sufferings which he had already gone through, the splitting headache he was then enduring, and the horrors he had yet to face in the future.

"It was a bitter bargain," groaned Timothy, as he turned his face to the wall and wept.

Meantime, the lately-appointed chief of the Turroside police force and his new recruit, the ex-valet of Percy Shafton, made their way to the garden gate where they had left their horses, and getting on their backs rode through the dark bush towards the barracks.

"That is what I consider a fairly good night's work, Hickey, my boy," observed the Captain with a light laugh as they went along.

"I can't see it, boss, frightening an old ass like that for some bits of paper. Surely we could have done all this without taking him in."

"We might, but not so safely; you see, this cheque that he will abstract from his brother's cheque-book will only be the prelude to a few more which we shall have till next Christmas to work off, as the bank will not be so much disposed to question cheques made out to a brother for the large amounts as they might with a stranger's name on the back. With this cheque I can open an account for myself and then receive this Shafton's remittances, and when the exposure does come, it will fall on the narrow shoulders of Timothy instead of mine. By that time we can trim down this squatter's bank account considerably, and shift our bank to South America, where we can still continue to draw on the Shafton estate. See, my boy, I'm going to act right to my own gang, you bet, and settle you all as planters; in fact, we'll found a new British colony if all goes as I hope things will go within the next twelve months."

"That seems all simple enough, provided we get away safely at the last, but ain't it a bit risky playing at policemen, meantime? Supposing some of them blamed officials come up and spot us."

"We must take some risk with such heavy stakes, Hickey, my boy; besides, it's only the warders who knew us in the past intimately enough to recognise us, and they won't come here; they don't send experienced men up to such work as this, it's only new chums, to be broken in, that are sent, and we're all a good deal altered from the days of clean shaves and short cuts."

"What about that fool as I have just sent off the trail, won't he come back and spoil your game?"

"No, Hickey, he won't come back here and I'll see

that James Danton gets the credit of what bush-ranging is done about here."

"And the girl who was hankering after him?"

"Will soon be tired of that fancy and safe out of harm's way with a new one, or I'm not what I used to be with the fair sex."

"I understand now, boss, and I think it's a good spec. all round, for the whole bilin' of us."

"You bet, chum."

The worthy pair clattered on after this without speaking any more on the subject, and were soon under shelter and enjoying the rest they both required.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### POLICE INSTRUCTIONS.

Two weeks after the compact with Timothy, Captain Wildrake rode over to Mr. Craven on public and private business. The mail-man had brought letters of instruction from Perth to the magistrate and the new chief of police which it behoved them to consult about. There were also letters with remittances for the absent Percy Shafton, and to cash these the trustee would have to get an introduction to the bank from the squatter, as a voucher that he was the proper person for them to be paid to.

During the past fortnight the Captain had been much engaged with his subordinates, which, owing to his energy, he had organised into a very respectable troop of white men and native trackers. He had now at his command twenty-four troopers, all men accustomed to horses and bush-life, and half-a-dozen natives.

Where he had raised his white police from had been

his own affair, yet, as he told the squatter, they were mostly the paid-off shearers and extra stockmen whom he had met in his riding about the bush. He found them on the tramp and having tested their qualifications, enrolled them in his ranks by twos and threes at a time. The blacks he had picked up from those friendly tribes that loaf about the fringes of civilization.

They were a very mixed set of men, these troopers, some of them not looking up to much as far as physique was concerned, while others were powerful men, rough customers, with sun-tanned faces, and ugly expressions, but others again were more polished.

Mostly they were under thirty, although one or two wore grey beards, but, as their leader remarked when he introduced them to Mr. Craven, they were up to the business he wanted them for, and would soon learn to be soldierly; so since the chief was satisfied, Mr. Craven swore them in as they came, and enrolled them as servants of the Government, giving them the uniforms, accoutrements, and arms which had been sent up, and supplying them with horses from his own estate, which he would charge the Treasury for.

This hastily organised force of guardians had not been formed before they were badly required, for of late there had been several outrages by bushrangers and natives on the distant stations and selectors. Round Turro-side things were safe enough, for it was well manned, but on those isolated stations, lying thirty and sometimes fifty miles from each other, the danger from attacks from hostile tribes of aboriginals and wandering gangs of escaped convicts, was a constant prospect.

"Good-morning, Wildrake," observed the squatter

as his visitor entered his office and study. "Your post is not likely to prove a sinecure from all I hear, for affairs round us are in a very alarming and unsettled condition."

"All the better, Mr. Craven, for I like work and my men are not averse to it either."

"And they and you are ready to start at once, I hope?"

"At once, if needful."

"Well, first business in hand is to give you this list of escaped convicts who have, within the past two years, taken to the bush, to study at your leisure. You'd better make a copy for yourself, and leave me the original document for my guidance."

"Yes, I'll do that, Mr. Craven," replied Wildrake, reaching out his hand for the list, when the squatter stopped him.

"I'll read it over for your edification first, Captain."

"Very well."

"First on the list is Derick Wild, escaped eighteen months ago, with five companions, and supposed to have gone north, age about twenty-six, height, five feet eleven inches, powerful build, eyes dark blue, hair black, skin sallow, expression sullen and forbidding, has a blue scar on right cheek and two front teeth missing."

Captain Wildrake smiled as the squatter looked up and exhibited his double row of even teeth.

"Same initials as my own, by Jove! D. W. and, saving the lost teeth, blue scar and ditto eyes, and I trust the forbidding expression, which is not mine, would almost apply to me. I must look out for that fellow, particularly if he is alive."

The squatter laughed easily and continued his reading. "A most determined and bloodthirsty desperado — original sentence, forgery — murdered three warders with exceptional ferocity before making his escape. Has been traced with his companions north, where several outrages and murders are supposed to have been committed by the gang, but not heard of for the past eight months, and may be dead."

"Let us hope so," observed the Captain quickly.

"Companions" resumed the squatter, "Sam Belgar, undersized and white faced, originally a London pickpocket. Rory Murdoch, a garrotter, six feet two inches, hazel eyes, deeply marked with small-pox, very violent and quarrelsome in temper, and dangerous when roused. Hickey Black, a life prisoner for murder and robbery under arms, red-haired and blue eyes, height, five feet nine inches, strongly made. William Jones, a Welshman, five feet ten inches, slenderly built, originally pickpocket and burglar, pale grey eyes and sandy-coloured hair, and with soft, slow manner of speaking. Andrew Small, native of Glasgow, five feet five inches, with wide shoulders and broad figure, accent very pronounced, small blue eyes, high cheek bones and prominent teeth, sentenced for house-breaking."

The squatter paused for a moment and then remarked, "There you have the Wild gang as they left Fremantle; they are all down for hanging when caught, so if you shoot them straight away it will save the country some expense and your men some trouble bringing them in."

"I shall do my utmost, you may depend, to wipe out this interesting crew."

"Pot them like dingoes, Captain, wherever you come across them, their scalp-locks will be evidence enough that you have done the State this service."

After this, followed a list of names and descriptions of run-away convicts, more or less important according to the gravity of their former misdeeds, with the crimes which they had since been suspected or proved to have committed on the settlers, to which Captain Wildrake listened attentively.

"James Danton, aged twenty-two, fair-skinned with light brown hair and blue eyes, height five feet eleven inches, convicted of forging and passing cheques, good-looking and well educated, but of sullen and intractable disposition; escaped alone; also traced for some distance north, but lost sight of for eight months and supposed to be dead; no charge against him since his escape has been laid. I say, Wildrake, if that young man should fall into your hands try to spare his life and bring him to me safely."

"Why?" asked the Captain, and then added in a bitter tone, "If he has been well educated it may be presumed that he once occupied a different grade in society from the generality of convicts, and if so, to put a bullet through him would be a greater kindness than to spare him for the hell he risked his life to escape from."

"It is a mere sentiment of mine," replied the squatter. "In my young days I had a friend called Danton, whom this description might have applied to, if it had been a little more flatteringly worded, indeed there was a look about that reprobate Shafton, of my old friend, as he was when I saw him last, that always warmed my heart towards him and makes me

even now inclined to overlook his deuced shabby treatment of me."

"He isn't a bad fellow," murmured the Captain.

"But he is a bad and a mean fellow, Wildrake, therefore, not in the least like what my old friend Danton was in disposition, for he was the soul of honour and generosity. I met him first at college in Dublin where we became sworn friends; afterwards he married one of the prettiest of English girls, and when I was compelled to leave the old country and come out here, he forced a thousand pounds on me as a loan, without which I might have come to grief."

"You paid it back, of course, and corresponded with him?"

"Yes, I repaid the money seven years afterwards, but the obligation never can be cleared off, and as you say, we did correspond as long as he was alive, but he died about two years after this, and as I had no acquaintance with his widow, who was in good enough circumstances, the intimacy, as far as letters went, fell off with his death. Of course this forger could not possibly be a son of his, for he could have no need to forge anyone's name, but still it might be a degenerate relation, and if that was the case I'd like to put him in the way of leading a better life for the sake of that dear old friend."

"Well, Mr. Craven, if I do drop upon this escaped convict, Danton, I'll bring him to you safe, as far as I can, so that you may examine him, and give him another chance."

"Thank you, Wildrake; now to consider the next serious nuisance of our colony, the natives. It is useless any longer for us to burke the subject, for too much

licence has already been allowed to them for our lives and property to be longer safe, they must be promptly and thoroughly—*dispersed.* You understand my meaning, do you not?'"

The Captain nodded calmly.

"They are becoming every day more troublesome and dangerous to the settlers, and if not energetically checked soon will drive out our people. I myself have suffered severely at their hands in the past, and I daresay no man knows better their graceless, treacherous nature than I do, or has tried more patiently to make them friends, and if *I* give them up at last as hopeless, it is not because I am not humane, but because twenty-four years' experience has taught me that they are untameable and not to be touched or won by kindness; like the dingoes, they cannot be brought under the control of civilization.

Again the Captain nodded his entire acquiescence, but said nothing; he was listening to his instructions and ready to carry them out without questioning their right or wrong.

"The humanitarians in England with their inexperienced agents here, know nothing about our difficulties and dangers They seem satisfied with expending their sympathies on these ruthless and treacherous savages who murder and rob the industrious subjects of England with impunity, while we have to suffer without protection from the Government or permission to redress our own wrongs. Formerly this was bad enough, yet we had no *spies then* to investigate too closely our actions or make more bother about a native being shot than about one of their murdering dogs, but now the matter is more serious, and we

must be able to bring as clear evidence against a native, as if he were a white man, before we are allowed to use our guns.

"Therefore to meet this most deplorable state of things, and at the same time satisfy those interfering outsiders, we have lately brought in and passed a law, which permits our police to *disperse* native camps when they become dangerous to the welfare of the colonies, and that will be one of your duties. We don't want you to take any captives, for we can do nothing with them; *disperse* them where you may find them too close to the lines of our settlers, and in your report keep out *any disagreeable details.*"

"Disperse is a word which entirely covers the *modus operandi* and after effects, I should say," replied the Captain smoothly, and then under his breath he murmured softly, "a keg of gunpowder is a good all-round disperser sometimes." This murmur the squatter did not hear however, as he continued:

"Exactly, we had a good deal of trouble before we agreed upon the best word for the purpose of a blue-book report, but at last this was considered to be the most appropriate. Now, by late reports I find that this trouble will need your immediate attention, for what we never expected from these hitherto rival tribes has occurred; they are combining nnder the leadership of an aboriginal Napoleon, called Warrogonga, who seems to be an able as well as a crafty fellow and likely to cause us even more trouble than the bush-rangers if he is not promptly stopped."

"I'll disperse him, never fear," replied the Captain grimly.

"You can thoroughly depend upon the discretion of your men? Better study them well before you set about this business."

"It doesn't take me a year to find out a man, Mr. Craven, I can thoroughly depend upon those I have picked out."

"And the black trackers?"

"Yes, I think I can reckon them up also, but I'll keep them well under inspection and not trust them too far, and if I find anything like undue curiosity or a disposition to treachery, why then I can—*disperse them* also, and get fresh trackers for the next expedition."

Mr. Craven shrank a little as he heard these steady words from the young man, which the other seeing, added quickly:

"Of course, Mr. Craven, I understand this business and the strict necessity there is for resolute treatment; at the same time, while I shall be firm, I hope I may also have a free hand to exercise the utmost clemency where I can extend it."

He looked up boldly as he said this as if to impress upon the squatter that if he was not permitted his natural desire for humanity and mercy, he would refuse the commission, seeing which, Mr. Craven replied hastily:

"Certainly, certainly, Captain Wildrake. I trust we are all good Christians and humanitarians as well as good colonists and honest men; you shall have no restrictions placed upon your actions, and the Government will protect you, and endorse what you consider needful to do for the welfare and security of the settlers, as well as for the good of the natives."

"Enough," replied Wildrake. "I shall make my preparations to-morrow, and start off the day after. My trackers have told me about Worrogonga and where I am likely to find him and his own tribe."

"Three days ago, they made a midnight raid on Mr. Robertson's station, speared two of his shepherds, and drove off about two-thirds of his entire stock. It will take him some time to recover that heavy loss, poor fellow, if you don't track them down in time and manage to rescue some of the flock."

"I'll not delay. Now, Mr. Craven, I wish to talk to you about my own affairs before we conclude business, or rather my absent friend Shafton; amongst the letters you sent over to me yesterday for him, is his quarterly remittance for two thousand pounds?"

"Yes, of course, you will want an introduction from me to the bank before you can draw upon it, and even then you may find it difficult."

"That is what I thought."

"The best thing I can do for you is to give you a cheque of my own made payable to yourself at sight, with an introduction to the bank as well, and I will pass in the form myself next time I am down there."

"Will you be going soon?"

"I must go to look after the shipping of my wool and hides within the next fortnight; when the sales begin, I must pay my yearly visit to Perth."

"Then you can see the bankers and explain the matter more fully than by letter, and if I get back in time, I can accompany you, and be introduced."

'The very thing, Captain. Now enough of business for one day, let us get into the dining-room for it's close on lunch time."

## CHAPTER XII.

### A SCRATCH SUPPER.

"YOU are a bold man, boss, to think of venturing into the lion's den like this."

"Shut up, Hickey, for another five minutes and then I'll speak to you, for I'm at the critical point with this broth, and my mind must not be taken from it by foolish talk, or the boys will miss a treat."

It was evening, and Captain Wildrake occupied the kitchen of the new police barracks, where, in his shirt, with sleeves rolled back and an old pair of trousers, he was engaged in cooking supper for his men and himself.

A respectful group of five troopers stood near him as assistants, also in the same undress as he was himself, for they knew what he could do in the way of cooking when in the inspired and engrossed mood that he was in this night, as they also knew that if interrupted after requesting silence, how dangerous he could become, and in their eyes it was more than mere supper he was planning just now, for they had experienced in the past what these delightful suppers led up to in the way of action.

It was no slight boast of his that he had made these five intimates of his gastronomes as far as enjoying good dishes were concerned; he could not make them cooks any more than he could make them poets. As he used to remark, only the Creator could do that, and He was particularly sparing about the ingredients which go to make a true poet or an

inspired cook, although almost any father could make a pot-boiler either in painting, verse or dish-mixing.

Captain Wildrake was not a poet in words, indeed he could not rhyme four lines, but his soul trembled with ecstasy and inspiration over the concoction of a new dish, and he would have been contented to cook for a dog if that quadruped could have appreciated his efforts, as he was content to cook for these men, who, until they met him, were satisfied in their flush times with fried steaks and chops, and who had to make the best in less fortunate times with skilly and coarse bread.

These five old hands only were permitted to enter the apartment devoted to the preparations of supper, while in the outer room where the long deal table was set, waited the nineteen white troopers and the black trackers; they were smoking to wile away the time and talking in subdued tones about this strange and to them somewhat effeminate peculiarity of their chief, but inside that inner sanctuary the five chosen under priests were silent and respectfully attentive.

"If we didn't know what stuff the boss is made of we might well be disgusted at this one softness of his yet there's no blooming error about it, he can make toothsome kickshaws out of mostly nothing," remarked one beetle-browed lounger to a foxy-faced little fellow who nodded softly as he replied:

"Ah, them dishes is toothsome an' well they may be, for while they be stewing on the fire, his brains are stewing in his head with big plans. You'll see something more nor a feed'll come out o' this extra supper to-night; jes' wait till the liquor comes on, and the pipes are lighted and then we'll have our work all laid

out as dry and clean as a newly-mangled shirt; he's a plotting some big bit o' business over them pots, you bet."

"I know. Lord, how he can cook steaks! Chops he leaves to Hickey to manage, but the steaks—when he has them in hand, it's like listening to a general giving his orders."

"That's gospel, every bit of wood must be chipped to a size first, or else he chucks it on one side with language hot enough to set them ablaze; steaks always raises his temper I find, they must be knocked about and cursed at, and when done, have to be bolted without delay; he don't make plans over steaks, they only get out his disappointment over something that's gone wrong. He glares at the fire while the wood is burning like a born devil, and when the flames go down and the blue gas is rising, then on with the beef, and God help the man that opens his mouth except to swallow; them steaks is scrumptious I must allow, as he does them, but somehow I always wish I was out of the way at sich times."

"So do we all, but to-night he is happy, so we'll have nothing but smiles and kind looks from him, as if he was a parson blessing us, and then afterwards when we are happy and content, something big to make us more chirpy still. I wonder if he ever tried to cook in quad? I hope to be with him if he's ever nabbed again."

"He won't be nabbed, he's too blooming smart, besides, it's the short and lofty hornpipe with him if he is."

"And with the lot of us I guess, so don't spoil my appetite by talking about it, Ben Holt, for the Boss likes us all to do justice to his skill."

While this conversation was going on between his appreciative rank and file, within the kitchen there was deadly silence, except for the sounds from the different pots or the soft directions from the chief to one of his watchful attendants, whom he mentioned by name with the article he required for the moment, to obey which orders the one asked leapt forward without a pause.

He had trained them well, so that they were now like assistants to some surgeon at an important operation; all looked grave and serious and never shifted their looks from the face of the master as he kept his black eyes fixed, like a chemist, on the simmering pot.

"Salt, Hickey," and Hickey sprang forward with the salt dish, which Wildrake took and dashed into the pot seemingly at random.

"That gum-leaf—quick, Rory."

He was getting excited so that they knew the critical moment was approaching.

"Has it been in water for half an hour?"

"Yes," answered Rory as he handed the saturated gum-leaf to his chief.

"Good."

He gave it four dips into the pot, twisting it round as he did so, and then flung the leaf into the fire.

"The potatoes are steamed enough, Sam, set them aside. In with the fish, Jones, softly, softly does it, dish that soup, Small, it is done to the minute, and has a flavour no one ever tasted before, Eucalyptus soup I call it, that single leaf did the trick, now for the fish sauce, and be quiet for a minute."

He strode about the room up and down twice with his arms folded, then dashed at the saucepan and put

it on the fire and for the next few minutes became engrossed, yet with his eyes rolling over the other dishes watchfully.

It was a fireplace of his own design, and built after the fashion of Chinese cooking stoves, the fire all inside with circular openings for the different pots; there were ten of them on at this time, all in different stages.

"Inside with the soup Hickey and serve, I'll be there in two minutes, that fish will be ready in three more minutes. Jones, dish it then and bring it in with the sauce without fail. You mind the fricassee, Small; it will done in six minutes from now exactly, so will the marrow, bring them in then and I'll see that your soup and fish don't spoil; meanwhile, your job is the roast beef, potatoes, and bananas, Sam; don't forget the horse-radish, or I'll pistol you. Rory, you come with me, I'll tell you when to bring on the fowl and salad and—yes, I'll look after all the rest myself."

It was what the Captain called one of his scratch suppers, for they had been hard at work all day preparing for their bush expedition, so that he only allowed himself one hour to prepare it, and it had nothing particularly new about it except the soup and that fish sauce, so that he had only enjoyed *two thrills* while preparing them, but these had been sufficient to put him in a happy and benevolent frame of mind. He enjoyed his own share of eating, he watched his men smacking their lips, with the air of an artist who is getting his little hasty sketch praised, and while he did so schemes for a most original subject filled his mind, and gave him the infinite rapture of the inventor.

"Don't the boss look dreamy and pleased to-night,"

whispered those at the foot of the table, "he's got something fine in his head, you bet."

"The soup, the fish, the *entrée*, the *pièce de resistance*, the salad, all were perfect, so that no frown of care crossed his brow, and as he had carefully chosen the drink, the boys knew better than to cloud that Jove-like serenity by cavilling at what he ordained, when they knew that the tipple they liked best would be on presently, and then they could enjoy themselves.

In his eating Captain Wildrake treated all alike, the black trackers like the whites, indeed he seemed to make a special point of educating these poor savages, and extended even his benevolence to presenting them as well as the others with one of the Hon. Percy Shafton's expensive cigars; then after this preliminary smoke had been taken he ordered the table to be cleared and the spirits and tobacco to be produced, so that every man and savage could take what he liked best.

"Boys," he began, after the pipes and glasses had been charged, "I have led you, as Joshua did the Isrealites, from the land of Egypt so far on the way to the promised land, and I hope I have educated you to appreciate the pleasures that lie before you."

"You have, Captain, you have, like a man," shouted his audience.

"I haven't shirked from danger in the execution of my duty?"

"Never, never, so help me——"

"What we are about to do now is a duty that I am sure you will be all one with me when I explain it. first we have to find out and wipe off a gang of bush rangers, called the Wild Gang."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!!"

"We're going to kill every man Jack of them before we come back, and I expect we'll both find them and do it so that the Western Australian Government will be satisfied and trouble themselves no more about that gang of bushrangers, except to pay us the reward."

"We will, Captain, blot them right out," shouted the appreciative audience, highly delighted with the humour of their chief.

"I also have a suspicion that this far-famed gang will just have time to do another big job before we wipe them out," said the Captain with a twinkle in his black eyes, at which they shouted with another appreciative roar of laughter.

"You are mostly right in your guesses, Captain."

"That done, we must go after another desperate gang who are about to crop up, called the Danton Gang; oh, a devil of a lot, they are, who will cause us no end of trouble, they are so crafty!"

"Who is Danton?" enquired two or three from the bottom of the table, to whom the Captain replied solemnly:

"I'll read you his full description to-morrow so that you may know him if you meet him, a very dangerous young criminal, I assure you he is, whom I reckon we won't be able to grab in a hurry."

"Ha! ha! ha! ha!!"

"We are going also to reason with the natives who have grown troublesome of late, and this is what I want to say about them."

He had been speaking in a bantering tone up till now, but as he reached this point in his speech he grew suddenly serious.

"Boys, I've been thinking to-night while cooking for you about these poor savages and their way of living; you all know now what a good dinner ought to be, thanks to my gift."

"We do."

"Well, these poor fellows eat their grub raw, or at the best, most atrociously cooked, and I cannot bear to think of sending them to kingdom come without giving them a chance of enjoying one properly cooked meal, therefore I have made up my mind to go amongst them, as a missionary might do, and show them how they ought to have cooked their snakes, caterpillars, maggots and ants. I have had an inspiration to-night how these delicacies may be made exquisite, and I intend to give them the benefit of my idea."

"They'll spear you, Captain, don't risk it."

"Boys, when I make up my mind to a thing I don't mind the risk so that I can carry it through. I am going to risk more than that when I go down to Perth for your sakes, and I wouldn't miss this treat even for the money I'll get for you at Perth."

"What the Captain wants to do he'll do, so there's no use trying to persuade him," said two or three, while the others shook their heads disapprovingly.

"These are my plans, boys, which I hope you'll help me to carry out. Wild's gang will do their last raid two nights after this on Denvers' station, which lies about sixty miles north, and we will come half-an-hour afterwards on their trail, and follow them hot, come up to them and shoot them down to a man. Is that agreeable?"

"The very thing, if they have time to conceal the swag."

"Yes, they're sure to do that, but it is needful that this gang should be destroyed, so that Government may leave their corpses in peace."

"Right you are, as always."

"After this we shall track down Worrogonga and his tribe, and polish them off—that is, *disperse them*, but I want to go amongst them by myself, while you are surrounding them, and cook for them the first and last good meal they are likely to enjoy in this world."

"Why, Captain, trouble about them cusses?"

"Boys, in eating I regard all men as brothers, and at such a time I love them as if they were. I have cooked and pleased Englishmen, Frenchmen, Italians, Spaniards, Americans and Chinamen, but I have never tried my skill on an aboriginal, and I couldn't feel happy if we cut them off without giving them a chance. Call it a weakness of mine, if you like," he continued in a voice broken with emotion. "It is a weakness, I admit—nay, it is a damned folly, and yet if it gives me a pleasure; won't you let me indulge in it just for once?"

He rose in his emotion and spreading out his arms, looked at them so beseechingly and with real tears standing in those inky orbs, that they were conquered to a man, and shouted simultaneously:

"Have your way, Boss, we won't gainsay your pleasure because we don't understand it. Cook for the cusses if you like, while we cover them with our rifles."

"Thanks, boys, for this favour, and in return I promise you two weeks of real fun as we follow up the Danton gang, always a couple or so hours behind them."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### JAMES DANTON BEGINS HIS JOURNEY.

DICK TURPIN'S ride to York must always be regarded as a great feat of endurance, and Black Bess must ever be extolled as the queen of mares, yet in Australia men are sometimes accustomed to take such long rides, and cover ground so quickly that even this hundred-mile gallop of the daring highwayman does not raise the wonder that it might do in England where horseflesh has to be considered before the life of a man, for as in England men are almost, if not quite, valueless, while horses are expensive, in Australia at this time they were considered to be about equal.

A slave or a noted criminal of course always does command a certain price in civilized countries, as well as horses and dogs; it is only the so-termed freeman who is valueless.

But slavery is done away with amongst European races, the English race particularly, some reader may say. Let me answer him that he is mistaken. Slavery flourishes nearly as rankly as ever under the British flag, only they give it other names, as they now-a-days re-christen murder, when they wish to legalize it. In England it may be called Federation, or Monopoly, and is worked on a system called sweating men and women. In the South Seas it is called "Black Labour Trade," and it is very black and barefaced indeed In Australia, where the Government murder men, women and infants as the Sepoys are said to have murdered the wives and children of our

soldiers, it is called by the mild and inoffensive term of *dispersing*.

But the slavery is as open, only a shade or so more heartless, as it used to be in the Southern States of America—before that martyr hero Abraham Lincoln put down his heavy foot upon it—both in England and Australia, and the murders are as wholesale, cowardly and revolting in their details, under this new title "Disperse," as they were when we called them atrocious massacres. The Aboriginal is trapped, poisoned, shot, bayonetted and otherwise destroyed, as energetically as they are trying to destroy those other pests, the rabbits.

We have now come to a stage in our story when it is needful for the reader to be as much behind the scenes as is the author, if he has not been so all along, it will save a great deal of pretended mystery and turning to the end, as we are all tempted to do in police sensational stories ; besides, it gives you a Jove-like sensation to know all about the schemers and their victims as you watch the puppets moving about and in their ignorance getting into trouble, when, if they only could have known as much as we do, they might have avoided many traps and saved themselves from much misfortune. This prescience on our part may tend to destroy a little of the clap-trap, but it has other advantages which I trust will equalise the want of the cheap thunder.

James Danton, the escaped convict and pseudo-Percy Shafton, did not sleep at the police barracks on the night when he left Turro-side Station, as his rescuer, Derrick Wild, alias Captain Wildrake, told Helen and her father.

Wildrake, Danton and Hickey Black, who had acted as valet during the past few weeks, rode to the barracks, where, after a long conversation, during which Wild tried his hardest to persuade Danton to go on as he had been doing, without success, the bushranger at last let the convict off his bargain on condition that he would go away without making any explanation, and to this the young man, tied down by gratitude to this outlaw who had saved his life, and, humbugged by his false demonstrations of friendship, consented.

Wild had whitewashed himself and companion, or as he himself put it, had drawn the blinders properly over this obstinate mule. He represented that, like Danton, he also had been the victim of a base conspiracy, that this scoundrel-fool Shafton had been the cause of his misfortunes, and that he had been killed in a fair duel as he so richly deserved.

He only wanted time to get his own money back, which the real Shafton had swindled him out of in the past, and escape from the country, and when put in this light before Danton he was forced to admit its lawless justice and to consent to vanish and keep out of the way until these ends were gained, since he could no longer act the part that appeared easy and just enough when he first took it up, but had grown so obnoxious when he attempted to play it.

He believed in Wild's dark tale of injury because the thing had chanced also to him and blackened his life. He also believed in the sincerity of this man's sympathy and friendship, because the fact that he has saved his life without apparent motive, and nursed him with so much gentleness (and Wild had a won-

derfully winning way with him when he liked, that looked like tenderness and sincerity, if it was so not at the time); and the fact that Danton was trusted now with the lives and liberties of these bushrangers and permitted to go forth from amongst them, free, when, for their own security, they might easily have killed him, were all conclusive evidence to his single mind, that like himself they had been the victims of untoward circumstances, meant well towards him, and only aimed at making their escape from the ruthless claws of injustice.

As soon as these promises had been made and the arrangements for the future concluded, the bushrangers hastily packed a couple of spare horses with what he was likely to require in the bush, after which the Captain went with him some distance on his way, appointing Hickey to attend him still farther so that he might not go astray, and giving him detailed directions about his ultimate destination, attentions which bound the sacred rope of friendship and gratitude still more closely about this lonely and wretched young outlaw.

"Seventy miles from here in a direct easterly direction you will find the gully that I have already described, with the cave which we have used. It is completely out of the track of settlers so that you need not fear them dropping upon you, while as for the natives, you will find that you can hold it against any number of them, and even that lot won't trouble you for long, as one of our duties will be to hunt them out of the district. Meantime enjoy yourself as you best can, I shouldn't wonder but that you may find gold in that gully, at any rate there are lots

of water-holes about it to wash the dirt, if you do come upon it. I'll see that you are in no danger of starving this time while you prospect about, you have a good month's supply with you now and long before that is exhausted I'll pay you a visit with fresh stores."

"You are too good, Wild," replied the unhappy young fellow gratefully.

"Nonsense, old man, you are a trained geologist, and I am your partner that's all, so must do my share; if you do find the nuggets, it is share and share you know. I'd rather take nuggets of your finding than that damned scoundrel Shafton's income any day, so do your level best, and I'll do mine."

They rode about a dozen miles together through the sultry night, and then Wild reined in his beautiful mare.

"I cannot go any further with you, Danton, for I must get back and make up some plausible excuse for you leaving so abruptly. Any farewell messages?"

"None, they must think what they like about me at Turro-side until I can establish my innocence, if I ever do."

"You will, my boy, now that you know the money lender was aware of the real criminal; have that letter ready against my visit, for your mother, and I'll see that it is safely posted to her. When the money-lender knows that Shafton is dead and there's no more chance of blackmail from that quarter, he'll take your mother's terms, never fear—Ah! I wish my job was as easy to manage as yours is."

"Perhaps the one may clear up the other?" replied Danton simply.

"Perhaps, who knows? they say a good turn to a man is never thrown away. Well, old fellow, so long! study those recipes carefully, which I have jotted down for you, a few simple dishes specially concocted for the bush, where the materials are limited and which any novice can manage; they will amuse you, and elevate your thoughts, and perhaps lead to better things when you come to your own."

"I'll do my best to be a bush gourmand, my dear, good friend," replied Danton with the first smile that had crossed his face that night.

"Don't make a laugh of it, Danton, for God's sake, for that hurts me most infernally," quickly retorted the bushranger chief in a sharp voice.

"Forgive me, Wild, I was not laughing."

"I know you don't mean to do it, but every one does, and yet it is the one sacred and sincere religion that I can feel, it is real and can be tested, which is more than can be said of most beliefs and enthusiasms, and it lifts a man out of himself as thoroughly and in a much more satisfactory manner than all the others put together. Danton, when I try to analyze my feelings as they are awakened up by this unselfish pleasure of cooking for others, I can understand how men could become martyrs for a cause, with cheerfulness; indeed I must own the greatness of that Intelligence which imparted to me such an exquisite palate, that gave me the keen and true instinct, which I suppose is inspiration and genius, to be able to know exactly what to put in, so as to reach the flavour that has originated in my brains, and to tell by intuition the second of time when the result is reached. I tell you what, Danton, if ever you can get one-thousandth part

of the rapture from gold finding or the establishment of your good name as I get out of my cooking, then you will know the joys of the blessed, for it is a great and soul-satisfying gospel!"

The dawn was beginning to flush over the plain, or rather desert, in front of them, a tender dimness of grey which partly quenched the blue flames of the night mirages, but not quite, as the bushranger sat on his saddle still clasping the hand of Danton and sawing the air with his other in an impassioned manner; from the nervous grasp of his hand Danton felt how much in earnest he was and thought "such an enthusiast cannot be a bad man."

While this simple-minded young outlaw was making these conclusions Hickey Black spoke up:

"Gospel I'd say it was, boss, the way you can cook, and a deal more comforting to a fellow than the cut-and-dry preaching of the prison chaplain, for you give us soft tack with a relish while he gives us stones; he teaches nothing that can cheer any man, but you have learned us how to live, so more power to your gospel. Lor! when I think on them times when I was contented with frying pan rubbish I feel disgusted that I ever could be so low a beast. Ugh! it makes me as sick as a monkey to think on them degrading times."

"Listen, Danton," said this enthusiast softly, "do you think my efforts have been wasted with such a result?"

"No," replied Danton, seriously. "You have achieved much, and I'll do my best to follow out your recipes, and enjoy snake *au beurre noir*, Iguana *à la crême*, maggots *au gratin*, and walloby *ramifolle*."

"Do, my boy, and I will think of your shortcomings with tenderness, and now, once more, so long."

"So long! and God bless you for your kindness."

With a tight clasp the two men parted, the Captain darting off at a gallop towards the settlement, and the other two cantering with the pack horses in the direction of that rapidly lifting dawn.

When daylight came they found themselves in the midst of an arid sandy and stony desert, with as desolate an outlook as mortal man could contemplate, a distant stretch of stunted forest behind them and in front a ridgy horizontal line, over this they went as fast as their horses could carry them, hour after hour, until about noon Hickey called a halt, and pointing with his whip-handle to a solitary mass of rock in the far distance, which bore somewhat the resemblance to a lion couchant, and said:

"That's Lion Rock, mate, go straight for that, and when you reach it you will see a range of mountains about twenty-five miles ahead, with some trees on them; you will get to Lion Rock about sun-down, sleep there, and next morning afore you start, spot where the sun rises and steer straight for that; once over the hill, you'll find a well-wooded country, look out for natives in that patch, for they are pretty often about there, and when you get through the bush, whieh is a fair size, you'll see the gully—only one tip you need about that bush, while you are on the hill-top, try to mark and carry in your mind the shapes of some of the dead trees here and there in a line due east afore you start, and you can't go wrong, and don't take your eye off the tree you have spotted as

the nearest guide-post until you reach it, then spot another, maybe a hundred yards ahead, and so on; also, if you do get the least bit uncertain as to the tree, then fling your reins on the horse's neck and let him go his own way, he will take you to that gully and cave, for he knows the road as well as any of us, only he won't go very quick if left to his self. Now for some tucker, and then I'll get back."

They dismounted, and Hickey very soon had a fire lighted from the stunted and dry bushes which were scattered about, and proved by the manner in which he made the tea and grilled the beef which he had brought, that Wild's lessons had not been wasted, and then, after resting for an hour, he re-packed the billy and provisions, and once more getting on his horse, he waved his hand by way of farewell, and dashed away at top speed, and as his horse was a good one, horse and rider very soon diminished in size, until they became a mere speck in the distance and finally vanished, leaving the mounted outlaw with his two pack-horses to continue their journey.

By sunset he had reached the shadow of the great rock, where, after cooking his supper, he stamped out his fire and charging his pipe sat down to meditate a little before going to sleep.

He felt happier now that he was alone and freed from the oppression of that burdensome secret; more hopeful also, for he had in his pocket a threatening letter from a London money-lender to the dead Percy Shafton, and which the deceased must have found waiting for him on his arrival at Melbourne, as a slight reminder that distance could not remove him

from the talons of this vulture; the hints were of too vague a nature to be acted upon by themselves, but they were sufficiently lucid to this victim of a mistaken identity to prove to his own satisfaction that he had suffered for the crime Shafton in his needy times had committed, and that Shafton had been fully cognisant of the fact. He knew the name of this blackmailer well enough, for it was his name that had been forged, and he now knew that the man's silence had been purchased at a heavy price, and that he was still expecting a revenue from this secret.

Well, the forger was dead, and the vulture could follow him no longer, and James Danton felt hopeful now that if he could keep himself out of the way until his letter reached his heart-broken mother, that she would be able to purchase his exemption from further punishment with the establishment of his innocence.

"Then, if Helen has not forgotten me," he murmured, "I can let her know how dearly I love her."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### CROCODILE STATION.

CROCODILE Station, which the Denvers Brothers owned, lay north about sixty-five miles from Turroside.

It was a ramshackle sort of place, for the brothers were termed bachelors in society, that is, they had no wives to do the honours, and make their station look presentable; they lived roughly in a slab hut of several apartments, with the most uncouth of bush-made furniture set up for service rather than show, and in no way better than the quarters allotted to their men.

Three or four heavy planks joined together and set upon trestles did for their dining-room table, some packing boxes and empty tea-chests acted for side-board and chairs, while their beds were hammocks with rough frames and ends of the St. Andrew's cross pattern and canvas tops. Very comfortable couches these trestled colonial couches are, still the sleeper had better go to bed sober and get in carefully, otherwise he may overturn the entire structure and find himself on the floor.

The brothers Denver—there were four of them and all stalwart, raw-boned fellows—very often had the earthen floor for their beds, for it was seldom that they went to sleep in a condition capable of making use of either hammock or canvas-topped bed.

They had very nice Christian names, for naturally their parents expected that they would grow up to be nice and Christian men. Most parents have such comforting hopes when they take their youngsters to church to be made Christians. Reginald, Alfred, Arthur and Ethelbert, were the handles their fond parents had chosen for them, and it is likely that in their childhood they looked sweet and innocent enough to deserve those pretty names, but they had been much under the sun since then and bore but few tokens, if any, about them, of either gentleness or romance.

They were tall and powerful men, also good-looking, after the style of buccaneers and freebooters as depicted in those glaring woodcuts of the penny dreadful type, the youngest thirty-three and the eldest forty-four, with long dark beards, hanging hair and faces deeply sun-tanned and not too frequently washed. Water was not over plentiful in

the dry season about Crocodile Station, and what there was of it was required for the sheep and cattle.

They did not visit their neighbours often, and when they did pay a visit, were not made very welcome, for they were known to be a violent, dissipated and disreputable lot, who set at defiance the laws of God and man, and did not at all add to the respectability or convervatism of the colony. They held most disgraceful orgies with their employees, and were rude and uncouth to chance visitors. Although they were considered rich enough stockowners, and capable enough in their own line, yet they were not considered a credit to the colony, which was a good deal in the favour of Society as here represented, for they were undeniably very bad men.

Only the worst and most reckless characters would take service with them, for the station with the adjoining boothy were nightly pandemoniums; no white woman would have ventured near them, yet there were female natives swarming about the place, and aboriginals, whom drink had degraded far below even their original savage state. These the brothers, with their tyrannical and animal wills, had dominated and made slaves of, and treated in every way rather worse than even the slaves of America were treated.

Floggings of the lubras were of constant occurrence, and other atrocities and outrages, which can hardly be mentioned, were amongst the ordinary incidents of the day at this station; indeed, such a state of terrorism existed here, that the natives regarded them with reverence as being demons in cruelty and vice, surpassing even the worst of those

vices that they themselves were in the habit of perpetrating. Perhaps this may have been the reason why Crocodile Station had never yet experienced a native raid. As for bushrangers, the brothers grossly and openly boasted that they would like nothing better than a visit from these gentry.

Here and there throughout the outlying parts of this thinly-colonized country, there were, and still are —alas!—to be met white savages of the vile and degraded type which I am compelled to present for the purpose and sequence of my story, as there are still to be found in the far-off portions of Central and Northern Queensland, some of them nearly as ignorant as the aboriginals with whom they associate and whom they drag down to a lower scale than before existed among them; some who have been educated in many of the refinements and most of the vices of civilization, who here abandon themselves, while making money, to the most revolting of debauchery, to the most unmentionable cruelties that ever were perpetrated on the earth's surface by God-created, devil-marred man.

These are the Legrees of course of this primitive society, for all sensible readers of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" must regard that monster as the exception of the old slave-owners of America, and thank the Divine Creator of mankind the St. Clares predominate amongst the human race; but that such wretches are to be found, and are permitted to exist at all, even if repudiated by all respectable people, cannot be disputed, although it may be hidden as much as possible.

The lubras are given to, or stolen from their tribes by, these degraded scoundrels for the use of them-

selves and their hired hands, are lashed at the caprice or pleasure of their owners till the blood gushes from the wounds; if they attempt to run away from the accursed bondage, they are forced to follow their masters for miles with ropes round their necks, tied to the horses' tails on which these devils ride; they are chained neck to neck, and have been left for weeks at a stretch under the fierce sun as punishment for insubordination, with all the other inventions of torture which the minds of savages, refined or crude, are so fertile in; and as half-caste children are reckoned to be inconvenient and dangerous as evidence of this immorality, which Government has to punish when discovered, it is seldom that *children* are to be found in these communities; the savage mothers are deputed to destroy, it has been asserted, without being fully disproved, their own half-caste offspring as soon as born.

America in its blackest times never lay under this awful charge, as both half-castes as well as full bloods were of recognised value in the slave marts.

On the second day after that supper party at Turro-side Barracks, Crocodile Station presented even more than its ordinary dilapidated and disorderly appearance, for it was Sunday, and the hands were having their weekly holiday; in fact it was the prelude to a long spell of rest for the extra hands, for they had finished up the season's work, which stood all packed and carted ready to be transported to the wool and hide auction market in Perth.

On the next day they would be paid off, and scatter in all directions in search of other employment, so that this one was devoted to idleness, conviviality and farewells.

This meant, with such men as were here assembled, a day of steady card-playing and square drinking, followed up with a night of wild riot and fighting, then to-morrow those who had lost their money would roll up their swags and tramp off to pastures new, with heavy and deep curses against luck, while those who still had some cash to draw, would loaf about the station drinking until they also were beggared and done for.

It was considerably past mid-day before the men turned out of their bunks and lounged over to the brothers' quarters, for they had spent a heavy Saturday night. None of them thought about washing themselves; in fact, water was a scarce commodity at present, and what there was of it had to be reserved for cooking purposes, so that they appeared in the bright sunlight with tangled beards, and locks uncombed, and faces sodden with drink, and stained with dirt.

They had no respect for these employers of theirs, nor did the brother squatters look for any; being burly savages, they knew how to exact obedience to their orders, but they wanted no ceremony when work was over; then Jack was as good as his master, and all equally dirty, bloated and disgusting.

In the yard which divided the house from the boothy lay all sorts of offal and rubbish, broken and empty bottles, preserved meat tins round which flies swarmed in countless myriads, boxes, with whatever was considered useless or advisable to pitch outside.

Potato-peelings, vegetables, used tea-leaves, ashes, all the débris of the living lay and rotted where they had been thrown out from the main door, for that door

opened directly upon the large front half of the building, which was used as dining and sitting-room, bar, store-room and office, and into this the hands lounged one by one as they had tumbled out of bed, and sitting down where they could, called for the one liquor that could be had—rum.

It was a sordid scene of hoggish and unredeemed squalor which only men on the lowest plane of human viciousness could have endured for an hour. A shanty thrown up with rough logs for walls, and trampled earth floor, all as innocent of any attempt at order or cleanliness as were the owners and guests. There were cases of groceries, bags of potatoes, and barrels of flour standing about with meat tins and other cannisters, dishes and pots on the shelves, also from nails hung sides of bacon, bags of onions, bridles and saddles, with the other sundries which could be hung up. In one corner was placed a hogshead of rum on a raised stand with spigot attached, and numerous tin pannikins for drinking vessels; beside this also stood the only article of furniture not home made, and this was a powerful iron safe from which the men who had anything to draw would be paid.

Beside the fireplace of this room, nearly a dozen of native women squatted, watching the smouldering wood logs with the huge frying pan on which was frizzling some steaks and chops for those that wanted food, while a number of tea-billies were ranged on the clay hobs, some with tea already brewed, and some with water only.

Outside in the yard other native women and girls, also black men, lay about amongst the accumulation

of rubbish and hordes of flies, all smoking as they basked idly in the sun-rays. A few of the females about the fire and outside were old, skinny and hideously ugly gins, but the majority were lubras or young girls, ranging from ten to fourteen years of age, all more or less in a state of nature; some of them shapely and pleasant to look upon, with their bright, brown eyes and milk-white teeth; but all bore the trade mark of degradation and slavery in the manner in which they shrank, terror-stricken, when any of the white men came near to them. These girls and women had been bought with perhaps a stick of tobacco or a glass of rum from their fathers or husbands, therefore could be flogged or tortured at the will of their masters.

On the long plank table were spread several greasy packs of cards, and as the visitors took their seats they fell to shuffling these while waiting for their morning drink. Reginald, the eldest brother, was at the present acting as barman, while the other three sat at the table ready to take a hand with those that had any money left to gamble. They were foul-fisted, black-nailed, whose dirty shirts, and trousers hung together with twine where the buttons had given way, for they only dressed themselves when they made the journey to town. At present they looked like the most villainous of unwashed and uncombed tramps, and yet they were wealthy and successful sheep-breeders, while in that locked safe rested the proceeds of a twelvemonth of prosperous hoarding, crafty trafficking and nefarious gambling, ready to be carried down to the bank and safely put away, an accumulation of treasure unscrupulously garnered on

all sides—from the fiery and doctored rum that they bullied or lured their servants to consume while with them and charged exorbitant prices for, from the provisions, tobacco and articles of clothing, from the cards, as well as from the more legitimate sources. If ever men deserved robbing and being murdered, these bully and blackguard brothers Denvers did.

And yet when washed and spruced up they looked and talked not unlike gentlemen. Their bankers had good reason to respect them. And when in town they were received at respectable houses, and possibly might get gentle and good women to marry them when they could make up their minds to pack off, or knock on the head, those coloured lubra victims of theirs, for they would have no encumbrances in the shape of half-castes to reproach them, or make their future wives blush. They had all the greater prospect of this, as they were men well set-up, tall and handsome, with the advantages of having been liberally educated in their youths; they were dirty now, swollen and purple with indulgence, but they had keen, hard heads, and cold, calculating hearts, and a few weeks of careful training would make them once again presentable, with this recuperative climate to help them, and this they had always the strength of will to accomplish on the journey overland to Perth; so for this and the next few days they could safely indulge themselves, and be as vile Yahoos as they liked, such iron constitutions they possessed.

"Well, lads, you are thirsty of course this morning after last night's fun; first drink belongs to me, so there you are, and no stint measure," said Reginald Denvers, as he handed about the pannikins to his

bloodshot-eyed visitors, who took them with trembling hands and drank the fiery draught without any more adulteration than it had already.

"What's the programme this blessed day?" enquired one young man as he laid down his emptied pannikin.

"I've got a little wholesome cow-hide to administer to that girl that I lent you last week—Wailla—she's been stealing again," replied the younger brother Ethelbert, looking up. "We'd better get that over first, and then I'll give you your revenge."

"Oh, dash it, governor! let the young thing off, and don't spoil her soft hide. I'll pay for what she took, for I'm nuts on her."

"Can't do it, Tom, even for your sake. We must keep up discipline in this camp, and teach these niggers a lesson, or we'd be nowhere. Ya-gan, bring your daughter here."

This he shouted through the open doorway, upon which one of the basking aboriginals leapt to his feet, ran through the yard and into the bush, coming back after a little time, dragging behind him, by the hair, a lubra of about thirteen, a comely, smooth-skinned girl, with her eyes almost starting from her head with mortal terror.

Ethelbert Denvers rose slowly from his seat, and, taking from the wall a heavy cow-hide whip, walked outside, some of the visitors following him to see the punishment.

"Take her up and hold her tight, Ya-gan, or I'll flay you," said the younger squatter, as he stood fingering the lash of his whip.

There was no need to strip the girl, for she was

already nude, and too terror-stricken to make any further resistance, therefore, seizing her wrists, the father hoisted her on his back, face to him, while one of the old hags obsequiously crept forward, and, lying on the ground, held her ankles; the punishment had been too often administered at Crocodile Station for the natives to be ignorant about the preliminaries.

No man there present interfered while the ruffian plied that heavy whip to those young shoulders and ribs, and the father stood, with his grisly head bent forward, like a post, receiving now and again an odd cut without flinching, as he held the body of his shrinking daughter on his back, while the skin came off in strips, and the raw and bleeding flesh glistened under the flaming sun. The brute laid on with his full strength, shifting the whip from the right hand to the left, when it was tired, and lashing remorselessly until the shrill shrieks ceased, and his own face was purple and steaming with his exercise, then he flung the ruddy-stained whip from him, while the father cast off his dead load, saying:

"Rub some salt on her back, that'll bring the jade to her senses; and come in, boys, for some grub, before we begin our little gamble."

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## CHAPTER XV.

### TIGER AND BLACK SNAKES.

THIS atrocious lesson seemed to have a very salutary effect upon the other gins and lubras, for their lethargy departed like a flash, and they went about the duty of steak and chop frying with great alacrity,

so that very soon the men were devouring their late breakfast like uncouth savages.

It was a gruesome breakfast, for the tin platters, such as emigrants use on board ship, had not been cleaned properly since they were first used; they were heated at the fire, and the grease of former feeds poured out on the embers, while those more particular gave them a rough wipe-out with a piece of paper, or a knot of wool hung at the fire-place for that purpose; forks were also decidedly at a discount, while each guest used his own jack-knife to cut the meat up, and his dirty fingers, or the point of the knife, to convey the pieces to his mouth.

They all took tea to their meat—tea which had been boiled over the smoky logs in the lidless billies—each man cutting his own chunk of damper from the enormous and heavy mass that lay like a flat grindstone in the middle of the board, home-made bread, as heavy and almost as hard as a quartz boulder, yet they seemed contented enough with their rough fare, and wolfed it voraciously, hurrying over it as if they had to catch a train; after which the women cleared the table, taking as their share what the men had left, while the men cut up their rank tobacco and filled their pipes, preparatory to beginning the real business of the day.

The regular hands attached to the station were not here represented, as their duties kept them away with the stock, and the Denvers allowed no skulking from work—they were hard masters. The assigned men also were not allowed to leave their own quarters, as it was only those who had money to squander who were made welcome in this den of

infamy and greed, and the assigned hands were not supposed to have any.

"Well, lads, whose shout is it this time?" enquired Reginald, while the other brothers produced the cards. And on this broad hint being thrown out the guests began to toss up, best man out of three, until the question was decided, after which the loser would be expected to stand treat.

As they were about to begin playing Reginald observed to one of the sitters:

"Jack Iverson, unless some of the boys can lend you a dollar you had better sit out of the game, as I find from the slate that you are stumped up."

"Take a dollar from my screw for Jack," answered one of the others carelessly. The brothers made a strict rule never to advance any money to their men beyond their obligations. On the wall was a rough charcoal drawing of a dog lying on his back, with his feet in the air, the only attempt at art about the place, and under it was written the significant device: "Poor old Trust is dead!" and most of the frequenters of this bush shanty knew what that meant; but in case they did not, on the shelf facing the door stood a battered and broken time-piece, with the words written in ink on a piece of paper, attached to its only hand: "No Tick here!" So that if they failed to understand the allegory of the dead dog, another poetic hint was given them to unravel at their leisure.

They were a reckless and a trusting crew, however, these shearers and wool-sorters, if their employers were not, and never thought about questioning the chalking up of their debts. Possibly these fools thought that the sharks must be satisfied with

the raking in they did, without having recourse to falsifying the sums; besides, odd shillings were not considered worth the trouble of contending about at this stage, for they were becoming mellow and generous as the afternoon wore on, and the "shouts," or calls for fresh drinks, grew more frequent.

But the brothers kept their wits about them, although they imbibed a considerable quantity also, only theirs was taken from a special bottle, while the visitors' was drawn from the cask direct, which made a great difference in the effect produced.

Through the afternoon they sat shuffling and dealing out the cards, that is, those who still had cash to draw, while those who were cleaned out either remained as spectators and sharers in the drink which the lucky winner for the time treated all round to, or else lay down in a corner to sleep until supper was ready.

The women in the meanwhile were busy peeling potatoes and making a pretence of washing them in pails of muddy water, while they watched, with their rolling dark eyes, the progress that the brutes were making towards that stage when kicks, blows, curses and maudlin endearments would be dealt out to them.

Occasionally a dispute would occur at the table, which the brothers sometimes managed to settle amicably, but at times a fist would be shot out before the complaint was uttered, and at such times the cards were dropped and an adjournment to the yard took place, where a ring was formed, and the combatants threw aside their shirts and had it out British style, and while they pounded each other, the bets

went on, and more money (or its equivalent, promises to pay on the morrow) changed hands. Three of these fights took place during the afternoon, the final one occurring at sunset, lasting until the tallow candles were lighted inside and the supper was placed on the table. Then the men staggered back, the door was fastened, and the feed recommenced—of Irish stew for a change, and tea once over again.

They were all more or less intoxicated by the time supper was on the table, for rum even in its natural state is a potent liquid, but with the blue-stone and other condiments with which the contents of this hogshead were blended, its stupefying effects were intensified, although the food and the tea helped to counteract them slightly. Still the men were rendered morose and quarrelsome, as well as low-spirited, and more nobblers were called for to revive them even while they gobbled down the slushy mess.

"There is going to be a deuce of a night here, Bertie," said the elder brother in a subdued tone to his brother, "so keep yourself square until we see them all out, for Alf and Arthur are gone coons."

"All right," replied Ethelbert Denvers. "I'll stick to tea for the rest of the evening. How do they stand?"

He referred to the accounts for and against the company, to which his brother replied with a chuckle:

"There are only three able to play for more than ten bob a-piece; and they are Ted Gregory, Bill Low and Bob Smith; they have still about three quid each to draw. You look after them, and leave the others to drink that ten bob, which they are safe to do between this and bed-time."

"Right you are, brother—that just makes an even hand; I'll look after them."

While the stupid pigeons were cursing at each other, or laughing idiotically over some coarse jest, as they dabbled amongst that mess of potatoes, onions and fat mutton, smearing their hands with it as they tried to stuff it into their mouths, and the guttering and rank bush-made candles sputtered and melted from their blackened and curling wicks, all unheeded and shroud-environed, making but a feeble illumination over those soddened and dirty faces, ten or twelve figures crept softly through the now deserted yard, for the aboriginals had taken themselves off.

The young moon was lying low on the edge of the eastern horizon, and the stars were all out and steadfast in their brilliancy, while the greenish pallor of after-dusk filled the sky, making objects appear black and flat as they crossed the open space.

These figures were all masked as far as their features could be seen, with black crape, having holes for their eyes, and dressed in tattered convict clothing, but they were armed to the teeth with pistols, rifles and knives, while round their bodies they had coiled lengthy pieces of strong rope, which helped to keep their tatters together.

Silently they surrounded the house, and when this was accomplished, two or three of them approached the window, looked for a moment cautiously in, and then drew back hastily.

"Ugh! the beasts are having *Irish stew*, Hickey, or what they call this vile abomination of half-cooked potatoes, hard onions, water and underdone flank of mutton; they deserve shooting straight off for in-

dulging in such a pig's mess. Curse me if I don't cook them a proper Irish stew, after we brace them up, before we go off."

"Better not, Boss, it might betray your hand; for if once they tasted your stew, although they were as fuddled as old Lot, they'd remember it afterwards and speak about it."

"You are right, Hickey; we must stick to business. And yet it makes me melancholy to think that men can commit such atrocities."

At this moment the single note of a bull-frog sounded from the other side of the house.

"The boys have got in by the back. You take this window, while I announce our presence in the usual way."

Reginald Denvers was the only completely sober man in that company, for his brother Ethelbert had been drinking; and as for the other two, they were useless as far as helping anyone; and at this moment Reginald sat at the top of the table, next to the window, and near to the cask of doctored rum.

There were some guns hanging on the wall, but they were out of reach; pistols he had also, but they were in the bed-room, so that he had only his jack knife, which he was using for the stew as were the others theirs.

Therefore, although a man prompt and courageous enough, there was only one thing which he or any one else could do under the circumstances, when the next moment the door was flung open and a masked stranger appeared with the words, very sternly and deeply delivered:

"Bail up, for you are covered on all sides!"

Reginald turned his eyes quickly from the brace of pistols, which the man at the door held out, to the window behind him, to see there the muzzles of two rifles resting on the ledge; from there he turned his gaze to the inner door, where stood another figure like the one at the front door; then looking at his helpless brothers and drunken guests, he acted like a wise man and "bailed up," that is, he dropped his knife and threw up his hands as a sign of his submission.

The gentry whom he had so often wished to see had at last dropped in, and, like many other unexpected visitors, found him unprepared.

A thought had flashed through his mind to jump up and make a try for those guns on the walls, for he abhorred anything like caving in; but even as this thought entered, a fatal and to him bitter incident took place, that clearly showed him how useless it would have been, as well as foolhardy.

His brother Ethelbert had the amount of drink in him which makes a man reckless of consequences, and at the order he had done what Reginald was thinking about; but as he sprang up, instantly a flame burst from the barrel held in the hand of the robber at the door, with a sharp report, and without a cry the villainous flogger of the native girl fell over the box on which he had been sitting, punctured right in the centre of his forehead. Wailla was terribly avenged.

"Does any other hog present want a specimen of my skill with the barker?" enquired the masked figure coldly, as he flung the empty pistol behind him and plucked another loaded one from his belt.

The human swine present who could grasp the

situation evidently were perfectly satisfied with the one specimen exhibited, for those who could do so were now sitting with their hands in a straight line over their heads, while the rest, too drunk to comprehend what it all meant, sat either smiling in an imbecile fashion, or else were asleep with their heads pillowed in their plates; the women were on the ground huddled together and passive.

Then from behind these two guardians of the doors several masked figures slipped in with loose ropes in their hands, and, taking Reginald first, they began to bind the company like bales of wool in such an expert fashion that it was impossible for them to move an inch or release themselves; after they had safely secured a prisoner, they laid him down on the floor.

"Good joke this, chummy," observed one of the shearers as they swathed him up. "What's it all 'bout?"

Reginald scowled darkly and bit his lips till the blood came, but he said nothing, only watched, thinking, "I'll know that fellow again who shot my brother, and will follow him to the devil rather than miss my revenge."

They strapped all securely up, lubras and gins as well as the men, and after this was done, the man at the door came in and looked about him critically.

"A nice piggery for successful squatters to sty in, I must say. Nothing much here to take except the contents of that safe. Have you the key?"

Reginald looked at him luridly, but said nothing.

"You'll know me again, won't you?" observed the bushranger easily.

"Yes, damn you, I shall."

"Good. Now produce that key, till we see what you have got."

No answer.

"Search the filthy animal, for I dare not go near him," ordered the chief to one of the tiers-up, who at once knelt down, and, after rummaging in his pockets, produced several keys, which he handed to the other, who said:

"Yes, this is the one; a very simple and old-fashioned affair, specially designed for the convenience of professionals."

A moment after the safe was open, and the earnings of a year of cheating and craft were hauled forth and divided amongst the bushrangers for greater ease in carrying away.

"Have you searched the other rooms?" asked the chief to one of the bushrangers, who appeared at the inner door.

"Yes, nothing worth lifting there."

"I thought not. Now, boys, turn those drunken beasts with their faces to the floor, all except this fellow here, whom I want to have a word with, while I run off this vile mixture, so that no more men may be poisoned with it."

He turned to the rum cask, and, setting on the cock, watched the contents rush down to the clay floor.

"Now, my friend, you said that you would know me again; and I'm going to give you all the chances possible, so that you might not make any mistake. There!"

Seeing that the other captives were all face down,

he turned to where Reginald lay, and, drawing off the crape, exhibited his features.

"Here you see the renowned Captain Derrick Wild, without any disguise. Now look, and carry my likeness down to hell."

Replacing his crape mask, he lifted his pistol, and, putting it to the forehead of the prostrate man, he blew out his brains. Then, turning to his men, he cried:

"Now, boys, let's be off and leave these drunkards to take their fill of the rum they like so well, as it flows round them—a free treat from Captain Wild and his gang."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### IN THE BUSH.

JAMES DANTON was up the next morning at dawn, with the desert lying round him cool and silvery grey, and such a holy feeling of freedom in his heart, blest with the simple pleasure of living, that his past cares lay behind him like unsubstantial shadows.

He was lord of the kingdom of nature, alone and free.

When the sun rose half-way up the sky this would be a desert, arid and thirst-provoking, like the world as he had experienced it, but at present it was the realm of phantasy and joy, for his body only was awake, and his spirit still sported with the spirit who had been with him in dreams or spirit-land. Who can tell?

When we fall asleep, miserable with the sorrows and disappointments of the day, and our souls awake or seem to awake, and wander through the heavenly

groves and fields with the one whom we may have longed for, but can never on earth attain, who can say that we have not in reality wandered with that desired soul, and that the kisses which were pressed upon our dream lips were not real and loving kisses?

The sky lay above him, soft, infinite and tender in its pearly clearness—the rock beside him rose like an enchanted citadel—the desert was filmy with deliciously cool vapour—all his own, as his companions, the horses, were, who looked at him with softened, mild eyes, all friendship and placid recognition, as his heart's mate was, who had not yet left him to fly back to Turro-side Station. She was with him still, while his sleep-filled eyes looked on the silvery sheen of the morning—a thrilling presence that whispered hope. But she was leaving him, for at this hour she also would be waking up, as she was an early riser, and how could she get up without her spirit?

"Good-bye, dear love," his happy heart throbbed this farewell while his lips murmured the words, as Helen Craven drifted away on the wings of the dawn to her little bed at Turro-side. Wicked little Helen, who had spent that night beside the Lion Rock. Would she wake up wondering at her listlessness, with her young limbs fresh enough, but her spirit, ah! so tired, and go down to her garden almost out of temper with her jessamines and roses?

James Danton lay for a moment on his back, passive and happy, and then he woke up, active, and ready for the day's journey.

Swiftly the light grew as he lit his fire and prepared his breakfast, while his horses came close to his

side as much as to say, "We have had quite enough of irresponsible liberty; bridle us and let us give over the hard task of thinking for ourselves, for it is pleasant to be led or driven." Some people are like horses, and think the same. There are others who are wretched, but might be happy if they could only lay down their foolish pride and do likewise.

The mists lifted, but even at their densest they were too filmy to conceal the distant mountains which looked so close as the sun rose, in their purply bloom. The wanderer noted the skeleton forks of the three dead trees behind which the sun rose, making the hill-crest look like Calvary with its empty crosses raised up. He fixed them carefully in his memory and then began his journey.

He had thirty miles to traverse before he reached the base of those hills, and yet so rarified was the atmosphere that they did not appear more than ten miles distant at the start, which rendered the journey all the more tedious, because mile after mile grew under him and yet they kept the same distant look; indeed, about mid-day they seemed to drift away and be receding like phantoms as he advanced.

It was late in the afternoon before he began the climb upwards between the trees which grew on the face of the hill, yet he did not mind that, as he had plenty of provisions and there was no need to hurry. When he got to the cave, he would have to write his letter home, and wait for Wildrake to come and take it to post, and after that such a dreary time before the reply came back.

It would be a difficult letter to post, he knew, because the name, "Mrs. Danton," would set the

Government on the *qui vive.* They would open the letter and see the contents and then when the answer came would arrest the one who called for it.

Well, he would think all that out and live as long at liberty as he could, and then, when the time had elapsed for his mother's reply to come, he would call for the letter himself and be arrested. That course must be taken before he could win his liberty, but that was nothing if the liberty came afterwards.

He had composed this letter in his own mind—he would say nothing about how he got his information, beyond the death of Percy Shafton, for he must not incriminate the man who had befriended him—no, he must not say anything definite even about Percy Shafton. He must word it so that the authorities should have no inkling of this tragedy, yet so that his mother could be able to tell the money-lender that his victim was dead. Well, that could be managed, he thought. The initials would do for the money-lender and yet keep the Government in the dark. It was a difficult letter to make up, seeing that his liberty and future were so mixed up with his gratitude and sense of obligation to this bushranger. Therefore he had left it over until he could be alone, yet he would manage it.

Slowly he climbed up the ranges with the sun red behind him, reaching the crest as the sun sank behind the desert in a direct line from him; here, by the side of the three blasted trees, he made his camp for the night.

He had a calm and dreamless sleep, for the spirit that had comforted him the night before was resting satisfied, and when he woke up the following morn-

ing he saw before him a spreading country that reminded him of days he had spent in Dorking, Surrey.

There were no windmills there, of course, nor any other signs of civilized man, but the panorama was similar; of scrub-land and rolling forest, with the differences (not much in the distance) of gum-trunks instead of the homelike trees, and wonderful heaths in the place of gorse, sweet-briar and hawthorn.

He saw glistenings of water amongst the herbage and bush, and patches of bright-tinted grasses which covered marshy lands, bright green grasses and reeds showing up vividly between the sombre olive and dingy blue-green of the gums and the russets of the withered heaths; it was a swelling spot of nature as yet unredeemed, but pregnant with possibilities.

A great valley it was, trending north and south, with distant ranges on the eastern side, thickly covered with trees, with indentations showing like purple markings on a faintly blue stippled surface where the gullies, great and small, broke up the masses. A fertile-looking valley after that lonely desert, with hills beyond which promised shelter and shade, also game enough to support life comfortably to one situated as he was.

Over beyond where he stood he could make out the parting on the summit of the far-off ranges where the great gully ran, towards which he had been directed, the crests of the ranges running level almost with that sudden and strongly-marked break, like the opening in a wall, having lofty cliffs on either side; from his point of vantage it was quite easy to see where he had to go, although when he reached level ground it would be hidden from his eyes.

Therefore he noted carefully the course of the sun and made up his mind to go on until it got overhead when he would rest until it began to decline, after which he could follow his shadow; he also made a note of the forms of the dead trees which started from the other foliage in his line of march, and when satisfied on this point he mounted his horse, and keeping his eyes on the one nearest to him at the foot of the range, be began his descent.

It was a rugged and steep stumble downwards, which only colonial horses could have managed without falling and rolling over. There was no track, yet these accustomed animals tackled it without concern, sliding down the loose parts, breaking through the intervening dry brushwood, and taking a tenacious hold of the flinty rocks and picking their way as carefully and as surely as mountain goats. In about an hour's time, they had reached the bottom, and were ambling along on level ground between the great white trunks and under the almost shadeless vertical leaves of the eucalyptus forest, which appears so thinly planted and so bare of foliage, and is yet so dense and confusing.

For an hour or two the rider seemed to be going in the direction that he wished, although he could not see further than a hundred yards in advance, while the trees which appeared to be so different in shape when seen at a height now looked as if cast in the same mould; he had observed a bare tree with two forks starting out in an eccentric fashion in front of him about fifty yards ahead, and thinking it quite impossible to make any mistake with such peculiar shapes before him, he took the chance to rest his eyes

for a moment by lowering them to his horse's neck and indulging in a prolonged wink, when as he opened them again and looked, lo! that particular tree had vanished from the front, or rather had multiplied itself into five of the exact pattern to right and left of him.

Had his horse turned while his eyes were closed? and if so, in what direction had it turned?

There was no way of answering these very important questions, for the sun was now high in the heavens, while on all sides the course seemed open enough. White-trunked, branch-bleached trees on all sides of him and in all stages of growth, from full life to dry decay; a great, lonely, but well-wooded park lay about him, burnt with the fierce summer suns, but in no way forbidding; and yet its sunny shadelessness filled him with a strange tremor of dread, for he had lost his confidence, and with it all sense of locality.

For a short time he tried to battle against this helpless feeling, making sudden plunges in one direction, and then trying to retrace his steps, and then he did what was wisest under the circumstances—gave it up, and dismounting set about preparing his mid-day meal.

It was a pastoral enough scene into which he had brought the human element; intensely hot and dry, yet under each of those gum trees lay wells of water sufficient for their sustenance and on their branches parroquets and cockatoos in numerous enough colonies; on a dead log opposite to him sat a kingfisher, the laughing jackass of the bush, eyeing him very gravely, as one out of work might do to a new comer; in the distance a drove of kangaroos hopped about, and over all spread the blue film of heat.

His horses waited for him to finish his repast with exemplary patience, perfectly indifferent to the perplexity which troubled his mind; they knew where they were, if he did not, and were satisfied with the easy times they were having in this paradise of hay, for thanks to the original loamy and moist nature of the soil here, the spring grass had not yet become dust as it was round about Turro-side.

His riding horse also seemed to understand perfectly what it had to do when his rider dropped upon his neck the reins after that hour of rest, and sat passively upon his back; there would be no unseemly hurry for the rest of the journey, but quiet hours of meditative nibbling, when time was uncared for and sufficient for the day was the amount of grazing land covered.

So James Danton sat and dozed during that afternoon, while his horses sauntered along, every now and again lifting their heads and gazing ahead earnestly, and after a sober trot forward, by way of exercise, for about half a mile, relapsing once again into the lazy gait of independence.

Sometimes he jogged up his beast, but without touching the bridle, then the horse would half turn his head and look with mildly-surprised eyes as if to say, "Now, what's the use of hurrying when you don't know where you want to go? I'll take you all right somewhere if you don't confuse me with badgering; when a horse has to do the thinking for, as well as the carrying of, his master, he doesn't want to be goaded like this." Therefore these contests generally ended in the horse having his own way in the matter.

When daylight faded, and night came, the wanderer

still stuck on the horse's back, holding his pack-horses by their halters, for he naturally considered that animals travelling by instinct could go along as easily in the dark as in the daylight, while it would get him to the end of the journey all the sooner. He reckoned that he had covered about twelve or fourteen miles since daybreak, that is, about five since he lost his direction, so that if they kept on all night they might cover another half-dozen of miles before daybreak, when he would see the sun rise and be able to form some idea of how they were proceeding.

There is a strange effect in the Australian forest after the sun goes down; first that green twilight comes on and deepens until it seems almost dark, and then a livid and ghastly glow spreads round like a weird mist, as if from the roots of the trees, and steals up until the trunks and limbs start from the gloom like the ashy limbs of corpses, this again changing to a pallid, salmon-tinted flush, that lingers for a long time before the total darkness drops and envelopes all objects in one universal chaos.

Through this subtle glowing the horses crept along with hardly a sound, while Danton looked about him and slightly shivered at the silence and solitude around him; then as that death-like flush passed slowly from the trees and the bush became a black space which no eye could penetrate, he was glad to lift his head and fix his eyes on the stars, which here and there glimmered down upon him from the open spaces.

Lover-like he fixed on one star and connected it with the maiden he had run away from. Would she be looking at that particular star, and thinking about

him at this time?—and again, lover-like, he decided that she must be, and so became *en rapport* with her in that strangely unreasonable, but wonderfully comforting, certainty that makes the love delusion so delicious.

All at once the influence that people sometimes feel in a darkened chamber that they are not alone, came upon him, and brought his thoughts from heaven to earth.

He could not see an inch before him, and his horses were walking sedately along, breathing easily, yet as he listened he thought he could hear other breathing beside his own and that of the horses; soft breathing outside his own circle of life—perhaps it might be the faint night wind sighing softly between the pendulous leaves—perhaps, and yet a thrill of apprehension crept over him as he listened.

This went on for some time, while he strained both eyes and ears to make sure, without success. Whatever it was the horses did not seem at all startled, but kept sedately on, until his nerves became so excited that he got out his match-box, feeling that he must strike a light even although prudence told him he ought not to do such a foolish thing as to make himself a certain mark should any enemy be near him.

Quickly he drew out a lucifer and rubbed it briskly against the sand-paper, getting a ghostly gleam of blue brimstone for a moment before it burnt up, and as he did so he looked round him—to see several lithe figures of naked natives walking alongside him, with their spears at the trail and their glittering eyes fixed upon his glowing brimstone.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### WORROGONGA.

In his sudden start at the sight of these black figures, the lucifer dropped from his fingers, and went out, while he made a clutch at his reins, and so brought his horse to a standstill when he heard a guttural voice at his side exclaim, while a hand was laid on his leg :

"Nah dalbăda-mammarap, barrabart. Kogang?"

As he did not reply to this evident question, another voice came from the darkness, saying :

"You white fellow, what you want here, on black fellow ground, eh?"

To which he replied :

"I lose my way; want to go to big ranges beyond."

"Ah! no sent after Worrogonga?"

"No!"

He heard some whispering after this, and then the English-talking native spoke again :

"Worrogonga want to see you, then he know ; you come to Worrogonga's camp ; if you no lie, Worrogonga take you to ranges to-morrow."

He felt his reins suddenly seized and his horse urged onward at a faster speed than it had gone for some hours, while he could now hear the natives plainly enough, snorting as they ran along on either side, for now that they had been discovered they threw off all attempt at concealment. They were in their own country, which they were prepared to protect.

He had often heard of Worrogonga and his depre-

dations while at Turro-side, and from what he had heard of their habits, since they did not spear him at the first meeting, when they had every opportunity, he felt that for the present they had no intention of hurting him; but, whether or not, he was in their hands, and must perforce submit to circumstances.

After about an hour of travelling amongst the tree-trunks he could see they were coming to a clearing, for the star-spangled sky shone over his head in clearer patches, and in a little time more he saw the red fire of a native camp gleaming out of the darkness, and reflecting its warm glowing within the still surface of a water-hole. Round the reedy margin of this water-hole the natives led his horses, and then they were in the midst of the myas, or native huts, with a crowd of gins, lubras, old men and children, or as they were called in that district, Yulung-áras, Kung-gun, Bettides and Gulang-garas.

The durdas, or dogs, were there in swarms, while the camp was a wild state of confusion and dirt, for they had occupied this spot for some time, and cleanliness and order are not amongst the virtues of the natives of Australia; also there was not a rag to be found amongst the tribe, male or female, but all rose up to welcome their Gulambiddies (young men), Wardagadâks (great ones) and Kardoes (husbands) in that state which lovers of the antique consider to be the most appropriate in an art sense.

James Danton gazed round him upon this very primitive assembly of demon-like nude savages. They were a treacherous and avaricious race, he had heard, who might as likely as not murder him, or, at the least, confiscate his goods; but it was past his power

to mend matters, therefore, as his mind had now recovered its tone, he resolved to take things as philosophically as possible, and study them while he had the opportunity.

The fire was hastily replenished with dry wood, and quickly blazed up, illuminating the place, and making the black figures appear more goblin-like than ever, while they all gathered about him, gesticulating wildly, and jabbering loudly in a language of which he could not comprehend a word, while he sat upon his patient horse with the pack-horses behind, waiting as calmly as he could upon the termination of the discussion, when his own fate would be decided.

Round the wide circle of firelight he could make out the dusky plain, with some of the scattered trees which grew there. The water-hole was a large one, with aquatic plants floating on it, and doubtless a plentiful supply of fish within it, otherwise these children of Nature would not have camped by its margin.

The huts, or myas, were very simple in their construction, being merely roofs of gum-bark and rushes placed upon a couple of low posts and slanting to the ground, where those who cared for shelter could creep under to sleep; they stood in a half circle round the fire, which occupied the centre of the ground, but were at this moment empty, for the entire population were at the council.

One tall and well-formed savage held the attention of the group, whom Danton recognised, by the sound of his voice, as being the English-speaking aboriginal. He was not a young man, for his hair and beard were grizzled, but he had all the agility and strength of a

young man, and his features seemed cast in a more generous and heroic mould than those of his companions; the wide-nostrilled nose was more prominent, the brow broader and the flashing eyes wider apart and larger; also, that he acted as chief could be seen at a glance from his arrogant action and the domineering tones of his rasping voice, as well as from the attention which the others paid to his words.

The old men and old women were unmistakably ugly, with monkey-like bodies, and would have gained decidedly by having had blankets about them, but some of the unmarried women and youths had limbs as graceful and skins as smooth as any bronze statue ever made.

Danton noted these details as he waited, the target of those numerous eyes, as he also noted with no little satisfaction that the spears, boomerangs and shields were lying idle on the ground, while none of the glances cast upon him were at all vengeful.

At length this chief came from the crowd, and approaching him, quietly said:

"White fellow, I am Worrogonga; you know me?"

Danton bowed gravely, as if to imply that such an important personage could not but be known to every sojourner in the land.

"Ah! yes, I am Worrogonga; me once white fellow friend and speak his tongue. No good that white fellow friendship to me. He come steal my country, yet say I must not steal his sheep. He take my country, I take his sheep, then he shoot my brother and my son, here where he shoot me, once, twice, thrice."

He pointed to three old scars as he spoke, and then continued:

"My brother and my son both killed by white fellow. I kill five white fellows, three for these and two for my brother and my son, so we square up to that time."

Again he paused, and Danton once more bent his head.

"Then they send out and kill all my family and friends, but I get away and make more friends, and now wait to kill white fellow for his badness."

"White fellows are bad to me also," replied Danton.

"You run from white fellow? They no chums of yours? They hunt you also, eh?"

"Yes. I have run from them—they hunt after me also."

"Good, you bushranger—Worrogonga no kill bushranger, he show you where to hide to-morrow, so no one find you. Worrogonga chief of five tribes now, since his own tribe cleared off. Worrogonga kill all dam sheep-owners though. Come, we are chums, Nagăl; you safe, your horses all right, your swag also, cook your billy at my fire, and sleep here sound; to-morrow I take you to bushranger's cave—Belăk."

Worrogonga evidently possessed great influence over this adopted tribe of his which numbered about one hundred souls, yet he had to exert all his authority, and not a few sturdy cuffs, before he could make his people understand that the property as well as the life of his visitor had to be respected; he helped Danton to hobble the horses and unpack what provisions he required, but would not accept a share of his meal, preferring the diet which the women were

preparing—grilled snake and iguana—to damper and salt beef, saying gruffly:

"No white fellow grub for Worrogonga, he black fellow now, and will be black fellow all his life."

Danton honoured him for sticking to his principles, as true men must ever honour patriotism, even although it may run in narrow and bigoted lines, yet if Worrogonga was rigid in his ideas, the others were by no means so exacting, particularly the young ones, for they devoured eagerly what Danton gave to them from his own stores, and after enjoying a good feed they all lay down to sleep without any ceremony or particular arrangement as to places.

The next morning three of the young men of the tribe brought the horses in, with the packages untouched, proving thereby that Worrogonga understood the sacred obligations of hospitality, and had influence enough to enforce his orders on these people who had accepted him as their leader. After another attack on the eatables, and a parting address to the tribe, he announced that he was ready to fulfil his promises of yesternight and act as guide to the guest. After this they set out on their journey, with a following of about ten of the fighting-men armed with spears and waddies.

So interested was James Danton with this friendly tribe, that he would have liked to have stayed longer beside them; however he saw that for some reason Worrogonga did not wish his company there any longer, this he explained by saying that there was to be a big gathering that night to initiate some of the youths into the mysteries of manhood, and as there were representatives from other tribes, it

might be dangerous for him to stay until they arrived.

"We no very far from where you want to hide and will come to see you by and by."

This was comforting, for no young man likes to be entirely closed from communication with humanity; besides, already he had taken a fancy to this aboriginal patriot, who not only could speak fairly good English, but showed in many other ways that he was of extraordinary intelligence for a native.

Aboriginals as a rule never seem to place any value on land, or give any consideration to their rights as the original possessors of the soil. The Maories do, as do the South Sea Islanders and Papuans, but the Australian native is a Nomad, who does not think of cultivating or claiming the ground further than as the territory over which he is accustomed to roam and hunt; and this right he never thinks he has lost, no matter who may have settled upon it.

But Danton discovered as they went along that Worrogonga had a comprehensive mind which not only grasped readily the language, but also some of the other secrets which make the British colonist so successful. He had in his friendly days gone a great deal amongst the settlers, and listened to their conversations and arguments about the measurements and value of land, and thinking the matter out for himself, had seen where the foolish native had been victimized; that firm, broad, square brow and those wide-set, open eyes were not given him for nothing.

As Danton rode along, he walked by his side with his dark, sinewy hand resting on the knee of his new friend and revealed his mind freely, for he had more

of the Tell and Wallace characteristics about him than the Machiavellian art of covering his aspirations, and by the odic instinct which draws single-minded men together, the white and the black man felt *en rapport* at sight.

"I can speak to you, white fellow, as if you were my son, for my heart tells me that you were black fellow once yourself, and we know that when a black fellow dies he must come again either as a white fellow, or else he comes as a Kundi, unless he stays on as a Jilgi, if he has been bewitched."

"What is a Kundi and a Jilgi?" enquired Danton, interested in this Pythagorean belief.

"A Kundi is what you call a rat, the poor fellow who does nothing big with his life and strength must become less when he comes again, and you white fellows are bigger and wiser than we are, for you can use the ground which we only waste; but a Jilgi is what you call a bad spirit which some enemy has bewitched, and who wanders about the swamps doing all sorts of evil because he cannot get back to life. The Kundi is a vicious fellow who will rob his grandson, for he has lost his tribe and friendship, but the Jilgi is a terrible fellow, for he is neither beast nor man but a demon made up of hatred and evil wishes."

All this may have sounded ridiculous to many men, but Danton had read much and thought a good deal about the myths and speculations of the ancients, and he saw here a link which would give him much after-thought.

A sudden thought flashed through his mind which he determined to put to the test as soon as possible, so as to find out how much of the wisdom of the ancient

races had come to this seemingly primitive race, so he asked carelessly:

"What must a native do to escape being made into a rat?"

"He must first learn the secrets of manhood, and afterwards he must discover the secrets of life."

"How does he learn the secrets of manhood?"

"By submitting to the rites and wisdom of men, and those secrets are only known to us," replied Worrogonga gravely.

"Perhaps I know some of them," replied Danton, making a certain sign as his test, to which the other at once responded, saying with a lighting up of his dark eyes:

"What next, brother?"

"This," replied Danton, holding out his hand, which the other clasped, after which he made another motion which Danton could not follow; when he saw this, he smiled and said softly:

"My son Doodylep was killed when he got your length, so I know that you were a *Gulambiddi* only when you were a black fellow. By and bye, I shall show you how to become a *Mammarap*, and perhaps a *Wardagadâk*."

For the rest of the journey Worrogonga talked about his own and his people's wrongs, also the plans he had formed to right or at least avenge them as far as possible. He had not much hopes of doing more than retaliation against these dominant invaders, and spending the rest of his days as a protest, yet this appeared to be quite enough, as no man who died protesting could retrograde into a rat, and in the next state he would reap his reward

—a tooth for a tooth was his firm idea of implacable justice.

He had also been able to see how these tribal jealousies and feudal wars played into the hands of the white fellow, and his ambition was if possible to found a nation and unite the rival tribes, when they might be able to make terms where now they could not. It was a noble ambition, and Danton recognised a master mind, and honoured him for the great possession.

"Five tribes listen to my words now; when the others can understand, then I may be able to send to the white governor and tell him what he must do to make us satisfied."

About mid-day they came to the mouth of the gully and half way up reached the cave which Wild and his gang had formerly occupied.

Here Danton found accommodation for himself and horses, with a plentiful supply of water, and after he had unpacked, Worrogonga and his men left him with an affectionate farewell, promising that he would visit him soon again and assuring him of his protection. Then the wanderer watched his sable friend depart with real regret, yet with the feeling that he was not quite forsaken by Providence.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CAPTAIN WILDRAKE'S POLICE TROOP.

WHEN this highly-efficient and lately-organized police force galloped up to the scene of the bush-rangers' outrage, which took place about two hours after the departure of the outlaws, they found Croco-

dile Station shanty gone and in its place the remains of a big fire, round which the survivors and native hangers-on were crouching and warming themselves.

There must have been a fair proportion of inflammable spirits of some kind in that doctored rum cask, possibly spirits of wine and paraffin to give it strength, as these Bush drinkers, like the ancients, had a decided leaning towards flavour and grip, for as the fluid spread over the hard floor and round the bound figures to the burning logs on the hearth, it had ignited and set the sun-baked wooden walls on fire.

There would have been no survivors left to give any particulars to the police of this disaster if it hadn't been for those native slaves who were inside and outside the burning shanty, and whom their white owners, through parsimony and selfishness rather than principle, kept from the intoxicants with which they so lavishly indulged themselves, for not one of these drunken sots could have prevented himself from being roasted to death as he lay amongst the blazing spirits.

But the women were sober and possessed teeth as sharp as rats', so that they were not long in gnawing through and wriggling from their bonds, after which they had dragged their stupefied oppressors to the open air and then liberated them, yet not before many of them were most severely burnt.

The natives could not tell anything about the affair that might serve as a clue, and amongst the whites only one man had been sober enough to hear or see anything, and what he did see and hear would not have helped them much, as he could only describe in a general way the figures of the men with the

sound of their voices. None of the others were as yet sober enough to comprehend how much they were charred by the flaming spirits, for the fumes, added to the drink they had imbibed, made them stupid and insensible to their present pain.

"The leader was a man of your height and figure, Captain," answered this man to Wildrake's enquiries, "and togged up in convict rags. I am a bit confused as yet, but it will all come back to me, and then I shall be able to swear to his walk and voice amongst a thousand, so if you like, I'll go with you on their trail, and the ride will freshen up my memory."

Captain Wildrake looked at him curiously for a moment, with a half sombre, half pitying expression, and then replied:

"Yes, perhaps you had best come with us, as you are the only man who can identify this ruffian."

The trackers made towards the north, and as they rode along, the Captain kept alongside of the shearer and spoke to him.

"Are you burnt much?"

"Only on the back of my head, as I managed to turn myself round before the rum got lighted."

"What is your name?"

"Jack Howard."

"Ever been in trouble?"

"No; I paid my passage out, and can go where I like."

"You have a wife and family, I suppose?"

"Not blooming likely; my hat covers all my responsibilities, and I mean to keep it that size."

"You are wise in that."

They said no more for about an hour, during which

they rode hard, then all at once the Captain ordered a halt, at a portion of the bush where the trees grew pretty thickly and where, in the distance, a faint red glimmering could be seen.

"I expect yonder is where they are camped. Now, Jack Howard, you and I will dismount and walk cautiously forward, while the others wait here with the horses; if they are our men we can surround them afterwards."

Getting off their horses the two men went forward into the darkness side by side, leaving the others on their horses with the black trackers in their centre.

"Our boss ain't like most military officers as orders the dirty work to be done by the subordinates, while they stand clear themselves," observed one softly, while another replied:

"No! he likes best to do them kind of jobs hisself. I'm afraid that young fellow ain't in a healthy condition this night, going so recklessly to spot them bushrangers."

"A wholesome lesson not to be too liberal with your tongue, Sam; I've seen a few before now got themselves into trouble through their knowing too much."

"Yes, too much knowledge is a dangerous thing."

A quarter-of-an-hour passed of intense stillness, then came the sharp report of a pistol, and all was once again quiet, while a deep breath broke from that waiting party.

"It's done, for sure."

No man spoke after this until Wildrake re-appeared alone, and mounted his mare, then he said quietly:

"Forward, boys! Jack Howard saw the bushrangers, but, unfortunately for him, they had spotted him also,

and potted him. I expect they have gone by this time, so we'll camp at their fire to-night and follow them up to-morrow; one of the black boys can take back the poor fellow's body, and tell the remaining brothers Denvers that we are on their trail hot, and will not leave them till we have run them down."

That night they slept at the bushrangers' fire, with the corpse of the unfortunate shearer close at hand, after a supper of roasted fowl and bacon, which the Captain had secured before leaving Crocodile Station, washed down by some first-rate old brown brandy, a present from Squatter Craven. Wildrake superintended the cooking of the poultry, so that they were done to a turn, and after the feast he sang a song or two of the sentimental order to his own accompanying on a banjo which he had borrowed from one of the boxes of the Hon. Percy Shafton, and which he, Wildrake, played fairly well, while the trackers listened open-eyed and open-mouthed.

He had won the heart of the black trackers completely by this time with his unvaried kindness, consideration and lavish feeds, so that their existence was like an intoxicating dream, and being stuffed like turkeys at Christmas time, they had almost lost all desire for pilfering and a great deal of their native suspicion; possibly also, this bloated civilization was beginning to blunt their keen instincts as pointers; at any rate, they were always ready to follow his suggestions and obey his orders when he asked them to stand back and wait, at such times as he wished to follow a trail for himself with his men.

Next morning two of these happy boys took back all that remained of Jack Howard, with the report

that the Captain gave them, and as their orders were to wait at Crocodile Station till the return of the troop, they enjoyed themselves as well as they could with their own debased countrymen, and country-women. The two younger brothers Denver lay in the boothy bunks, cursing their bad luck, having their roasted skins poulticed by their tinted nymphs, and waiting revengefully for further news, as their stock of hides and wool was waiting in the open yard on their recovery.

It was a full week before the next messenger came from the police leader, but the natives who brought those tidings were treated to the best that Crocodile Station could still command.

The bushrangers had been run to earth and shot down to a man, the evidence of which was their rags sent back; these the two brothers carried with them down to Turro-side, along with their stock, for they were now recovered enough to start upon their overland journey. They were not so pleased to hear that their cash was as yet undiscovered, but, on the whole, they were delighted that the murders had been so completely avenged, and therefore, took down to Richard Craven, and afterwards to Perth, a most glowing account of the pluck and thoroughness of this new police inspector, whom all decided was the right man for the post that been given to him. The local press extolled him in unequal type and on sugar-paper, but with that unstinted enthusiasm for which the Australian public have been always celebrated, toward the hero of the hour, while he is still *new, and therefore a hero,* before familiarity makes them contemptuous, or the absence of the

glorified object can raise their fine and virtuous scorn.

Meantime this model police force, having exterminated the notorious Wild gang, proceeded to the solving of the other colonial difficulty—the natives.

Captain Wildrake had received full information about the combination of the different tribes under Worrogonga; he was also aware where they would be likely to make their head-quarters, and how easily he could walk in amongst them, not as Wildrake, the police officer, but in his former character as Derick Wild, the bushranger; for as they had befriended Danton, so had they also befriended him and his gang in former days, before he became a respected member of Society.

He did not require any native trackers to find them, for he knew that one of the tribes would welcome him to their camp. Worrogonga was a clever fellow, and had likely enough heard about him in his new character, but the chief was trusting where he gave his faith, and would not think of suspecting Wildrake of any evil, so that the tribes would deliver themselves into his hands like tame sheep.

He had thought the matter carefully out and had come, although very reluctantly, to the conclusion that, for his own safety, they must be *dispersed.* He could not play gooseberry all round, particularly with the natives, for they were on the war-trail, and would not make themselves a blank as the Wild gang had done, so that he must carry out his commission in a *bonâ-fide* and complete manner; and this troubled his instincts of harmony as well as his reasoning principles, for he liked to have a motive emanating

from himself for murder as well as for cooking; and to polish off these enemies of the Society which was also his most inveterate enemy, even for the sake of his own immediate but temporary interests, did not have an artistic enough motive to satisfy his exacting tastes without a compensation of some kind.

"I have cooked for them before, at least they have had the benefit of the remains of my ordinary bush efforts, when means were extremely limited, but I have never yet devoted my abilities to their own accessories. They must be finished off for the sake of my comrades' and my own security. That cannot be disputed, and yet it is nevertheless a question of expediency that only the tactics of the most refined civilization can justify. I dare not use my former friendship to steal upon them and destroy them root and branch without hurting my own artistic feelings, but if I go as the apostle and missionary of good living, then that can be no treachery; besides, if I can only give them one real thrill of pure gastronomic pleasure before they leave this world, it must compensate for my share in the taking off of those innocents."

It is very hard for commonplace and ordinary mortals to enter into the intricacies of an enthusiastic mind; we may well wonder in our commonplace way how a pious disciple of the Holy Inquisition could face the stake cheerfully himself rather than abjure the efficacious tenets of torture—how those holy widows of India can endure the flames for the husbands whom they may not have rated very high in the scale of manhood while they were alive. To this enthusiast, a successful effort in gastronomy seemed a very just and proper set-off for the betrayal

of friendship, or the massacre of a tribe, simply because it was the sincere and earnest effort of the kind of soul which had been given to him, and also because he risked his life to carry it successfully out.

There was no question about the risk, because he wanted to go alone amongst them, and if Worrogonga, who had many spies, considered that he was trading with the powers, as he was, then his life was not worth a moment's purchase; and yet this enthusiast had made up his mind to go amongst them and risk his life, so that they might have one pleasure which they had not yet enjoyed on earth, before they departed from it. This vow he had made to himself—this principle he meant to carry out, despite spears and waddies, and—— Shall we condemn him off-hand for his black treachery, while we honour the money-makers, who create and foster war for the sake of the commission on bad saddles or faulty guns?

He was a bushranger with æsthetic principles, that was all; a Roman of the latter days of the Republic, or a Capitalist or Statesman of the nineteenth century. Without those redeeming principles, he might have been a common low-bred murderer; yet let us honour him, we who bow down daily with veneration to his larger-minded fellow-craftsmen of the pen or the tongue, in Westminster or the Stock Exchange.

During the week that they, the police, were hunting down the Wild gang, a new bushranger crew cropped up, the Danton gang, a set of desperadoes headed by a fair-haired, brown-bearded man, who were as bad as the old lot.

The leader seemed to be proud of his name, and as fond of advertising it as some of the modern soap

companies. There were several settlers and stock-owners who were robbed by this miscreant who could describe him. He always wore a mask, but his fair beard hung beneath it, and he never failed to announce his name, James Danton, before he left the pillaged house. A number of outlying settlers were on the look-out for the new police superintendent to give him a full and detailed description of this daring bushranger, Danton.

One night, when the young moon was becoming lustrous, Captain Wildrake and his force halted about five miles from the camp of Worrogonga. They had been traversing the country pretty wildly of late, and now were determined on something definite.

"You're bent on going, Captain?" observed Hickey Black to the figure who stood before him, clad in shirt and trousers only.

"Yes, Hickey, this is borne in upon me, and I must do my duty."

"Well, we'll do ours also. When we give the full bull-frog's chorus, you know how to clear out, for there are bullets going to spread after that note!"

"All right, I give the first note to say I'm ready.'

"Right you are. You'll be surrounded. You pipe out the first wail for rain and we'll take it up, then afterwards there'll be hail an' no errors!"

"Right, but don't be in a fluster."

"We won't. Every man will have a gun at a head long afore you're ready. Go ahead, Boss, with your dishes. We'll look after the dessert!"

"The coffee, he ought to have said!" murmured the Captain, as he took his solitary way to the native camp.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### WILDRAKE'S MISSION.

To the thoughtful student of humanity there is nothing more ridiculous or laughable in what is generally termed the eccentricity of an individual, than there is about the peculiarities of a dog. In the case of the dog, we at once trace out the cause of this peculiarity by the theory of heredity, and with the man we must do the same, even if we cannot accept the Pythagorean theory.

With some people, flowers are such a necessity that they will rather want food and other ordinary comforts than forego their daily nosegay ; with others it may be books, or old china, refined diet, or good liquids, and without the particular desire which nature or rather former custom has grafted upon them, being gratified, life becomes a misery.

One man is quite content to lie on hard boards and maybe, likewise indifferent to what he eats or drinks, but he must have the highest class music, even although he may have to go in rags in order to attain the gratification of this desire, or rather imperative craving; to his friend who does not care for music, but likes the best tobacco, this craze for music seems to be as contemptible as the tobacco seems to be base selfishness to the musical enthusiast. We are all foolish and ridiculous to each other on some particular point, and all terribly in earnest from our own standpoint on one thing. If we can only control

this passion a little before people then we are considered to be perfectly sane, but if we cannot, then our friends begin to think it is time to shut us up—and this is all the difference between the lunatics at large and the lunatics in durance vile.

A man may be born in a palace and trained to appreciate every luxury which unlimited wealth can purchase, and yet prefer the stables and the grooms, his pedigree may be all correct, but for all that he has the soul and tastes of a clown; or one may be born in a hovel of the commonest stock and yet have the desires and refined tastes of an Epicurean.

Derrick Wild, the bushranger and escaped convict, forger, murderer and burglar, etc., had for sire a village carpenter, and for dam an ex-housemaid; he had attended the village school up to the age of nine in that irregular fashion which the children of the poor in villages do take in their mental pabulum, a month or so in the winter when there is no out-door work to be had for boys, but working in the fields during the summer.

His father and mother were both indifferently honest and commonplace, quite content with their daily bread in the plainest and roughest-dressed fashion, and yet this son, by an instinct which it would be difficult to trace, turned up his infantine nose at chine of bacon, and felt his proud and sensitive stomach revolt at the rough cooking which satisfied his parents. He would have sold his whole kin at that early time for a dinner such as the vicar indulged in, and he could not sit down even to potatoes and salt without some kind of external decoration to set it off.

He left home early, without being greatly lamented

by those stupid parents, who could not sympathize with the aspirations of such a nature; he required patricians to comprehend the instinctive yearnings of a past life, therefore he entered the service of the best family he could get into, as page boy and general help about the kitchen, and here he was initiated into the ancient arts and qualified himself for the company he afterwards controlled.

Geniuses are seldom lamented by their friends, for this fortunately limited quality makes the possessor imperious and impatient with less favoured individuals, also morbidly sensitive, and otherwise unreasonable; all very trying characteristics for relatives to have to put up with in one whom familiarity and habit prevent them from seeing to be anything different in fibre from themselves or more worthy of forbearance and respect; there isn't the same halo round the head of a saint in his own household that there appears to be over him on the causeway, and it is the same with your genius at home.

Derrick Wild had however made his influence felt in the kitchen of the patrician family in which he first took service, and when afterwards he became a patrician on his own account and had a court of his own to shine before, the spirit which had distinguished him in his early youth, whether a return of old Rome or not, set him apart from all others in his self-chosen but perilous profession. It was noted amongst the other flash professors that whenever Derrick had done a successful piece of business he always disappeared from the usual haunts, and when he returned it was with a fresh stock of culinary knowledge Like a true artist bent on improving himself, he on such occasions retired

to Paris and took lessons from some celebrated chef, expending the proceeds of his robbery in cultivating his gastronomic tastes.

When he had money he dined at the very best places, not out of that reckless spirit of waste which generally marks the thief, legal or illegal, but rather with the desire to discover the secret of some particular dish by tasting it, and afterwards have the pleasure of producing it for himself and others.

Hitherto the sticking up of stations by the Wild gang had been distinguished by two distinct traits, the one their remorseless and often wanton shedding of blood, and the other, the very careful selection of articles from the store-house, pantry and cellar.

The police troop travelled, as the bushrangers had done, with a great following of pack-horses and a varied assortment of provisions and pots, for without these articles, to him necessaries of life, Wildrake would have been utterly miserable and unfitted for those decisive and daring acts which made his followers depend on him as their leader. The ordinary members of his gang had no respect for him as a cook, in fact, they only partook of his lofty efforts under protest, yet they had sympathy for this weakness also, most of them having had their own weaknesses in the olden times for bull pups or bull-finches and canaries when off duty, and even now they kept up these weaknesses as well as they could with blaspheming cockatoos and tumbling parroquets. Even the most severe amongst cracksmen or cut-throats must prove himself human by having his moments of relaxation and folly ; and this is how

the most untrainable of his band regarded this gift of their captain.

With those whom he had specially trained up to his standard of taste it was different, of course; Hicky Black, Sam Belger and Rory Murdoch, with the Scotchman and Welshman, had grown to appreciate him at his proper worth. To stop a dangerous witness with a bullet through the brain—that was business pure and simple that the Captain never shirked. They were as ready to tackle such work as he was himself. But he had taught them the supreme joys of living, where before they had only existed; he had taught them to appreciate flavour and bouquet, and how much more delightful and lasting were the sensations of a well-organized dinner than were the evanescent fevers of Bacchus or Venus; and for this added life they adored him as a second father, while he held them in equal tenderness.

They had been beasts before, without discrimination; they had become philosophers. Formerly they had slain upon impulse, or spared from reasonless pity, now they worked out their crimes on the basis of prudence and reason always, no foolish pity or passionate impulse moved them, for both of these weaknesses stirred the blood and disturbed the digestive functions. If a man or woman was to be spared it wasn't because they had gentle qualities or were lovely and amiable, but because their taking off was a waste of powder and lead. In this way, by a course of adroit diet Captain Wildrake had made his aide-de-camps almost as perfect in their sentiments of prudence, policy and the enjoyment of life's richest pleasures, as he was himself.

Captain Wildrake was going on a foolhardy mission, and for what seemed to his followers to be a very foolish sentiment, but to him it was irresistible.

He left his band under the charge of Hickey Black, who was well able to take this post, and giving them instructions to make a wide detour and surround the camp at nightfull and be ready for the attack when he should give the signal, which would be the first verse of a song that was popular at the time most of these exiles left England.

That there could be no mistake about this, he would whistle the first line and then pause, this meant "all ready," the second line would give them the cue to approach and cover their victims, and as he finished the verse they were to fire all together, and then rush in with their pistols and knives.

It was a diabolical plot, and would be more so if those natives, who had been allies of his in the past, received him with their former friendliness, and yet the thought of this treachery did not trouble him in the least degree. These natives were not likely to be of any further use to him; being witnesses of what he was in reality they were dangerous; besides, he had definite orders to disperse them, and it would make his position doubly sure to obey these orders, and he meant to carry out his commission thoroughly while about it.

His position would be one of extreme danger between the firing of that first volley and the charge of his men, for the natives were rapid in their movements, and besides, he would be amongst them and might have an accidental bullet put into himself; but he did not mind this risk so long as he could carry out

the programme that he had drawn out. He would cook that last meal for these victims, even though it were at the price of his life, and about this he was sincere and devoted if in nothing else.

Therefore, taking with him a pack-horse laden with what he required, and dressing himself in one of Shafton's suits, he rode forward boldly in the direction of Worrogonga's camp, and arrived there at sun-down, getting a friendly greeting from that chief and his adopted tribe and an introduction to the ambassadors from the other tribes who were there at the time.

Worrogonga, as I have said, was singularly free from suspicion for a native with those to whom he had given his friendship, although he was relentless and steadfast in his hatred; he therefore listened with credulity to the bushranger's reasons for coming so far, when he told him that it was partly to see the friend who had gone to the mountains, and partly to warn the natives about their own danger.

He was perfectly frank with Worrogonga who, he took for granted, knew about his assumed character at Turro-side, as indeed he did. He felt no qualms of conscience when he assured this dusky chief of his friendship and desire to screen Worrogonga, who received these false protestations as due for past acts of protection on his part, so that the devilish act before Wildrake was rendered all the easier by this blind confidence on the part of the native.

No better time could have been chosen for the extermination of these savage pests or patriots, whichever way the reader looks upon them; besides the

tribe, from which no member was absent on this evening, there were forty men representing the four other tribes who had come for a corroberree and consultation with their chosen leader, and when Wildrake announced his intention of making the feast and contributing his share in it, the idea was received with wild delight by everyone except the chief, and by him with indulgence.

"Cook, Ngundu, if you please, for my tribe, since they like it," said Worrogonga. "We have fish enough and snakes, yurnas too and yan-goes—all that our men need to give them strength to fight; whether made ready by you or the yagoes all the same to them, but not for me—my own Kardo will cook for me all I want to-night."

"Give your Kardo a rest to-night, and let me do it for you instead," answered Wildrake eagerly.

"No, Ngundu, I have said, you no mind me to-night."

And with these words the chief walked away, leaving Wildrake looking after him with a perplexed face of real distress.

"I must persuade Worrogonga to enjoy this supper in my way, for he is the man I'd like to give pleasure to best, and the first one who ought to fall afterwards. Confound it, if he remains obstinate, I cannot have him killed with those crude ideas about eating unimproved, it would be mean, and haunt me afterwards. No, dash it, he must eat and be made happy, or I'll have to save him somehow until I can persuade him to enter this gastronomic paradise as far as a poor savage can ever enter into such a state of wisdom and bliss."

When a man has devotion enough to stake his life against the fulfilment of a principle, or a fad, then whether he succeeds or fails, his efforts must not be taken lightly, nor is he likely to make them in an indifferent spirit himself.

Derrick Wild, or, as we had best call him, Captain Wildrake, had premeditated and planned out this culinary effort for some days, and now fortune had favoured him to a farther extent than he had anticipated; he had a bigger audience than he had hoped for, and it is always gratifying to a great artist to have a big field to work upon.

He expected to find some maggots or grubs, for the natives can nearly always lay their hands on this interesting article of food, also perhaps a snake and an iguana, with a few cockatoos and an opossum, but here he had to his hand the produce of the bush in lavish plenty, for the natives had hunted far and near for this feast, which was to be the prelude to more serious business and amusement.

He found all that he wanted in profusion; the perfect mound of the large succulent grubs which are found in the dead wood in great quantities, and which the natives enjoy either roasted or raw, delicate marrow-like pupæ which only the bigoted insular prejudice of Englishmen prevents from appreciating as it prevents them enjoying frogs and snails; snakes, tortoise eggs, lizards, large and small, with the swamp frogs and some little fish ever to his hand; of parroquets, cockatoos, bush-turkeys, opossums, bandicoots, wombats, ant-eaters, porcupines and kangaroo tails, he had a good choice; of vegetables also there were no lack, the muurang which serves for

parsnip, the muakk as carrot, the taaruuk, the puewan, the fern root, and mushrooms of various kinds, one of which is dug out of the ground like a truffle and is about the size of a turnip.

Of sweets he had a goodly choice as well as of flavouring herbs. The buumbuul or native manna, wild honey and gum sugar—the materials for a great least lay ready to his hand, as well as the consumers with a fine appetite, which a little delay would not hurt at all.

This inspired cook looked at his materials with a tender glance while he pondered deeply, then a lofty glow passed over his dark features, and with swift decision he selected his assistants from the women and young men, and straightway he began his self-imposed task.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### DISPERSING THE NATIVES.

WORROGONGA had not the ingredients within him to make a gastronome, or epicure, although he was heroic enough in other ways, for as he passed the mound of grubs he seized a handful and began eating them as one might do shrimps, that is, holding them by their heads and nippers and biting off the bodies alive, much to the momentary disgust of Wildrake, until, moved by a born artist's curiosity, he picked up one and trying it the same way found it delicious; then he grew more thoughtful, for a true gastronome has no prejudices.

"Worrogonga is right, in eating them alive," he murmured to himself. "Like oysters and tomatoes

they must lose a little in flavour through being cooked. Let me see—first course, grubs raw, without condiments; second course, grubs done like whitebait with cayenne, salt, lemon juice, and roasted fern root served with them. Snakes and lizards to follow, with stewed muurang. Opossum and kangaroo after this, with munyuup and weeakk mashed together and a little made gravy. Cockatoos, parroquets and bush-turkey served with mushrooms, also a salad composed of cooper-reed. Grubs mixed with roasted cheese to follow, and truffle mushroom. Honey fritters and gum cake to finish up with. I can do no better without spoiling the native character of my feast, which I don't wish to do."

He pondered yet a little while as the sun went down and the young men built up the fires. Worrogonga and the fighting men had withdrawn some distance away, and were earnestly discussing affairs, but now this gifted traitor was deaf to their voices, deaf to everything beyond the duty before him as he planned it carefully out.

"I must have soup. Yes, I'll make snake soup, and tortoise eggs, roasted hard and dropped within it. For drink, let me see, with the grubs and fish, chablis; I have three bottles of that, which will just go round the crowd; it isn't native, but that cannot be helped. They'll make chablis some day in the colonies. For the solids a small glass of sherry each, and for the grubs and cheese port, with a glass of brandy to finish off with, and afterwards a good cigar each, before I begin my song. I must halve the cigars though, for they are too big for the time I have to give them, yes, half a good cigar each and then—heaven."

He found many willing hands to help to unpack his pots and other articles, and much curiosity in the task he had offered to do, so that no one thought of out-post work.

Up blazed the fires; there were five of them lighted for this occasion, and stones were put to get heated, with pits dug for ovens, while Wildrake threw aside his coat, vest and shirt, and arranging his pans, set to work with a passionate earnestness which promised success.

It was a prolonged feast of which the chef did not partake, for he had to see to everything. Ten minutes after he had commenced operations he invited his company to sit and served the first course, live grubs without garnish, and after that he positively flew between the fire, the bottles and the unsophisticated company, never sparing himself for a second, but with his eyes here, there, and everywhere, and the perspiration rolling down his body—a most willing and devoted slave.

Yet he had his reward, with all except Worrogonga, who ate only his share of live grubs and then allowed the other dishes to pass by him; the others, however, Wildrake could see were transported into the seventh heaven, and ate as freely as he furnished them, drinking with the same superb ease what he poured out to them. It was sublime, for he found these gentlemen and ladies of nature were a most appreciative crowd, who showed in every line the enjoyment that they were having; they ate up everything calmly and asked no questions on the order that he appointed, showing the same zest for the sauces as they did for the solids; in fact, as he looked round

their happy faces with a benevolent glance, he sighed deeply in his content, for he had created a masterpiece and educated a people.

"This is worth living and dying for," he murmured, as he got out his box of cigars and began to cut them into two pieces.

Not a man, woman, or child there but had dined to the point of happy indulgence, except Worrogonga, and him Wildrake eyed with an anxious brow.

"He has not enjoyed my efforts, therefore he must live until he can do so, if at all possible; the others are prepared to go, they are for the first time truly happy, God bless them all!"

He was not a canting enthusiast, nor at all the kind of young man to make use of his Creator's name as a form of benediction to his fellow-creatures, however often the name might issue from his lips, but at this crowning moment of his culinary triumph, as he looked round upon those black faces shining with indolent content while they puffed lazily at the half cigar which he had given to each diner, his own heart glowed with benevolent satisfaction, and he felt fatherly enough towards them to ask God to bless them for their appreciation, with all the fervour of an earnest and sincere faith.

Life would be a long and stony desert but for those short-lived flowers of self-gratulation which the generality of mankind mistake for bursts of piety, benevolence or patriotism.

The five fires were blazing up at different points of the camp in honour of the five tribes who were here represented and to give them light for the coming corroberree, so that as the natives squatted or lay on

the earth, their bodies were clearly thrown up to view, and hardly a shadow spot remained within that circle of yellow radiance.

Beyond this circle, however, the bush was buried in deeper obscurity than usual by reason of the contrast, so that nothing could be seen within its depth.

They were, for natives, all rashly confident on this night, perhaps by reason of their trusted white guest who had come from the only part where they expected danger, for the outlying tribes occupying the other quarters were now their allies; they were overcome with the sleepy and contented languor which ever follows a satisfactory and freely-partaken dinner; the very dogs had gorged so much that they also lay torpid and heedless of their duties by the side of their owners; it was the best of all times for a friend to wish them rest and peace, or an enemy to surprise and cut them off.

As their friend, Captain Wildrake, who had now resumed his garments, wished them peace and rest—eternal rest after peace and pleasure, for the moment was now approaching with the speed of a vulture for him and his men to—disperse them.

He had all but accomplished his mission and his satisfaction was almost unalloyed—almost, but not quite, since Worrogonga was there, who had never tasted the dishes he had made, nor even accepted the cigar he had offered him. This was the jar in an otherwise perfect arrangement, for his mind was divided with the thought of how he could spare this obstinate one until he had overcome his scruples, yet hold him fast until then, and the pure joy of an accomplished difficulty; because, although his audience were not able

to understand all the flights which his genius had taken for their benefit, they had intuitively enjoyed them, and by refusing nothing were now in the perfect harmony of peace, and would soon be at rest.

His dark eyes were soft and moist as he glanced round the happy circle of nude sybarites, and a tender smile trembled on his humid lips, while a soft and gratified sigh burst from his perspiring chest, for he had worked hard and now felt tired and passive although happy.

Then, after this moment of gentleness, those same dark eyes suddenly became bright and dry as they swept the dark fringe of that centre of light and noted at certain parts, between the leaves, tiny flashes of light as the firelight sparkled upon the polished barrel-ends of his men's guns; the moment of tender pleasure was gone, while that of action had come, and once again he was the resolute and remorseless demon of slaughter.

Approaching Worrogonga, who sat a little apart from the others with his eyes fixed moodily on the ground, he said, laying his hand on the chief's shoulder;

"Worrogonga, could you remember a song if I whistle it to you, and try to do it after me, for that is the signal by which I wish to know when you come, so that I might help you then?"

"Yes! Ngundu! I can whistle, see——"

"No! don't whistle before I do," hastily said Wildrake, putting his hand over the other's mouth, which had begun to form the letter O. "Come a little this way with me, Worrogonga, and I will teach you this song while your people rest."

The chief rose quietly to his feet, then Wildrake took his arm and led him to a part outside the torpid and doomed group and not far from the dark circle of shadow which hid the assassins. Here as they both paused still full in the light, Wildrake got directly in front of the chief, and looking towards a part of the bush where a glitter of light showed him they were covered, made a sign, upon which that flash suddenly went out to reappear pointing in another direction.

"The air is heavy to-night, Ngundu! Either it is filled with spirits or else a storm is coming soon."

"A storm most likely, Worrogonga, but listen and try to remember my song."

"Whistle it once, and I shall remember it until I die," replied the chief deeply.

"This is how it goes," said Wildrake, taking a hold of the chief by both shoulders (after a warning glance to right and left), much as a wrestler does at the beginning of the bout, while Worrogonga stood with his arms passively by his side and an attentive expression upon his face.

Wildrake was a clear and loud whistler, and the air cut through the night shrill as a bird's pipe; at the end of the first line he paused and said:

"You'll remember that, Worrogonga?"

The chief nodded silently, and then the whistler continued with a pause at the second and third line, repeating his question as he paused while the listener nodded.

Wildrake took a long breath before beginning the fourth line, while his black eyes positively blazed up as they fixed themselves on those of the chief, who was now looking gravely and attentively upon him,

his grasp also tightening convulsively on the naked shoulders, while the whistle began with a muffled shake which, however, instantly became shriller than ever as it leapt like a shriek into the air.

The half cigars were almost ashes by this time, yet still the natives contentedly sucked away at them, indifferent to the blisters they must have made on the lips with the closeness of the red glow. They had instinctively turned their eyes towards Wildrake when he began to whistle, but were now only watching the eddies of tobacco smoke as they curled in front of them while their suppers were being digested.

For one second only after the whistler had ended that sentimental verse—for it was a sad and plaintive one, despite the shrillness of its execution, particularly at the final line—an awful silence seemed to touch the camp, so that even the flames remained stationary over the logs, and then the storm broke.

Flash ! flash ! flash ! came from all sides of the bush, while those natives only who had been covered, sprang into the air as if sent up by a galvanic shock, the others still remained placid and unconscious ; then, with the reports of the first, a second volley blazed out and more of the natives half leapt up and fell back dead before the next report echoed through the bush, and as the sounds came the pseudo-police force were upon them with knives, pistols and clubbed guns, stabbing men, women and children and scattering their brains.

They had comprehended the intentions of their leader with regard to Worrogonga, and left these two alone while they massacred the others ; no one was spared ; indeed so stupefied were these poor savages that they were slaughtered before they could rise to

their feet or make a single move towards their weapons, and there was lurid light enough for the murderers to see what they were about, and no possibility of their making any blunder. Like wild dogs upon a penned-in flock of sheep they rushed forward and completed their fell work.

They were all good marksmen, and in the two volleys they had plenty of time to make a careful selection amongst the victims and no bullet was wasted, so that the best of the men were down first, and the charge was simplicity itself. Men, women and children looked up stupidly to receive their quietus; most of them had no time to put up their hands, and with those that did, it was of no avail, for their hour had come. Not a human being there, young or old, was allowed to rise to their feet—only a few had time to shriek out their panic before they were struck down and their voices hushed for ever.

It was a horrible picture of blood, fire and death. The ground before this raid, all caked and hard with the heat, became black and muddy with those pouring streams, as the murderers trampled over their victims, the scene lit up by the ruddy fires; the murderers in their government uniforms rushing about, their fiendish faces glowing, the naked and defenceless bodies under their feet, brain-battered and out-gushing.

Young girls with shapely limbs and rounded bosoms, children with chubby arms and legs, stalwart men with their steel-like muscles, old men and women with their white heads and withered frames—blood flowed from all, and made a shambles of what so lately had been a feast.

All were dead, except the mongrel dogs and the

chief Worrogonga; the former ran yelping into the bush unheeded; the latter was wrestling madly with his traitor guest and false friend, while the lost tribe were being done to death.

As the bullets sped forth at that first volley, Wildrake flung his arms about the naked chief, and tripping him up, pitched him heavily backwards, going down also, but uppermost.

Wildrake had the advantage of the first grip, but a naked man is hard to hold, particularly so wiry and active a savage as Worrogonga.

For a moment they writhed together on the ground and then Worrogonga got free and sprang to his feet, taking, as he did so, a swift and comprehensive glance round.

He was weaponless, and that glance showed him that resistance was useless; he must imitate the dogs, and fly.

Again Wildrake had him, and once more they struggled furiously, biting at each other like mad beasts, but this time it was Wildrake who was thrown, and as he fell the chief hit him full in the chest a blow that might have smashed the breast-bone of many a man, and, free once more, the only spared man of that camp darted towards the bush like a stag at full speed.

Ping, ping, ping! From where he had been thrown, Wildrake fired after that retreating figure, each bullet hitting the body of Worrogonga as he crossed the fire-lit space, but none of them stopping him, and as a fourth bullet tore the bark from a tree at the outer edge, he had disappeared into the bush.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE FINDING OF WORROGONGA.

THE first few days of his stay in the cave James Danton spent in making his place comfortable—prospecting about the gully, and the composing of that letter for home.

The cavern he found to be well worthy of his research. It was divided into three apartments, with remarkably narrow entrances to each, and very dry and airy.

In the first apartment the roof was lofty and the space large. It had been the stables for the bush-ranger gang, and was still plentifully garnished with the surroundings of former horses, for if a bushranger is kind to nothing else, he is kind to his horse, and ready to give up his own shelter and comfort to his beast, and all this for a good reason—outside humane feelings or the love of animals.

The entrance to this cave was only wide enough and sufficiently high to admit of one horse passing through at a time, but inside it was roomy enough to accommodate a hundred horses comfortably, with a roof, forty feet at least above their heads, with mysterious ledges high up, which yawned blackly at the spectator who stood below, and which harboured countless hordes of flying foxes and bats. These ledges spread one above the other right up to the roof, some of them five and eight feet wide and others only two.

The second apartment was reached by a low

narrow passage, through which a tall man would have to stoop and a stout one to squeeze his way, and after ten feet of this sort of pushing one came upon a chamber of about twenty feet in extent both ways, with another archway beyond, where one had to go on all fours to reach the third chamber, which was magnificent both in its size and in its appearance.

It was of granite formation, as were the other portions of the cavern, but here the stone seemed in some fashion to have become decomposed and have a mixture of copper and iron blended with the quartz, for never had Danton seen such a combination of rich colouring with such odd shapes. Artistically all this interested him greatly as he looked at it by the help of his candles, but geologically it astonished him intensely, as well as rousing his curiosity.

There were veins of rotten rock which crumbled between his fingers, with hard patches of crystal quartz, also green, blue, and rusty red places trailing about, which were wonderful.

"Shouldn't be surprised to find more than gold here," he murmured to himself as he looked about him on his first visit. "Just the place to find precious stones, if Australia can produce such, with her other wonders."

The gully outside was a cheery enough place for a sportsman to wander about, a well-wooded and plentifully-watered glen, that is, it was blessed with a wide and deep water-course, which would be a roaring torrent thirty feet deep and over five hundred wide in the rainy season, and even at the present time it had many deep holes well filled with water clear and sweet.

The character of the foliage here was semi-tropical, the Zamia flourished plentifully, with cabbage, grass-trees and palm-like ferns; also on the dead wood sweetly-scented orchids clung with other climbing parasites, which went far to beautify and cover the gaunt limbs and trunks of the Eucalyptus in its different varieties.

Game was plentiful, bush-turkeys and wild ducks particularly, with the bower-bird and opossums and wild cats. These, with other denizens of the bush, made the vicinity of these cool water-holes their home, while all the rest of the bush was parched and dry.

The cliffs which burst out here and there from the leafage and grey earth were mixed in their formation, yet the gold-promising quartz predominated. But what impressed this geological student mostly, were the other signs besides those of gold, which lay on all sides.

"I can find gold here in payable quantities amongst that washed-down debris, I daresay," he murmured, as he looked about him, "as well as in those boulders. Yet it strikes me that there may be found something more precious still, opals—if not emeralds, rubies and sapphires."

He would not starve with this stock of game surrounding him, while there was also much to interest him in the flora of the place, for he had studied the rudiments of botany as well as geology. For the rest of that first week when he was taking his walks, he did not use his gun much, but went about with his axe, tapping the most likely pieces of rock with the blunt end, in constant expectation,

each piece that he split open, to see the object he was after blaze out upon him with its prismatic fires.

He pondered carefully while walking about on the letter he had to write, and drew out many rough drafts in pencil before he was satisfied. At last, however, he got one to his mind and sat down to write it out, with the pen and ink which Wildrake had provided him.

He told his mother what she knew already—about his innocence—also the full particulars of where he had passed the day during which he was supposed to have been at the bank cashing the forged cheque. Then he related all that he knew about Shafton, giving the letter S only, as an indication of his identity, with the startling likeness between himself and the real criminal. Next he told his mother to go to the money-lender and tell him that the man he had held in his power was dead, so that he need have no further expectations from him. She was to inform this blackmailer that his letters were in their hands, and to prove this he made a copy of the one he at present had with him ; and then she was to promise not to prosecute, or rather give him the chance of getting out of it his own way, so long as he made the innocence of the victim a certainty. To do this she would have to bribe as well as threaten this human vulture. Finally, he told his mother that he would wait for her reply twelve months, and then give himself up to the authorities. She was to write to the post-office, Perth, where he would call himself for it, which would, of course, be giving himself up.

He made a duplicate of this letter, not that he suspected his friend Wildrake, but because he was a

methodical young man, and he wanted the copy to show to the authorities when he was re-taken ; by that time Wildrake would be out of the country, and he would be able to speak openly, where at present he was only able to hint darkly.

Satisfied with these letters, he sealed and addressed the one to be ready for the coming of Wildrake, while the other he sewed carefully into his shirt, resolved to keep it there and say nothing about it until his time came.

On the Sunday morning, which was the fifth day of his arrival, he thought he would take a holiday and pay a visit to his native friends, as none of them had been near him since his coming, so, putting up some presents, he led his horse out after breakfast, and mounting, left the gully and made for the bush.

It was an easy four hours' ride from the gully to the native camp, and having once gone the way, he was not at all likely to lose himself, as there were markings that Worrogonga had shown him which once learnt, made such a thing impossible, so that he went along without any apprehension, noting the landscape about him and thinking how much better it was in its fertility than that portion round Turro-side.

"This is where a man might settle down and live in peace with the one he loves."

Helen Craven was never far from his thoughts, and now, as he rode along, he was wondering if he could send her a message by Wildrake to assure her that he was not the ingrate she must suppose him to be, without implicating the man to whom he owed life, and what was more precious, the future hope of standing an honest man.

Like Romeo, before he got the tidings of the death of Juliet, *his* "bosom's lord sat lightly on its throne." The year of probation would pass somehow; he would make the hours go with hard work, and perhaps win from the earth enough to make him the equal of his loved one in money, as he was already by birth; she was young enough yet, and if she was fated to be his for life, then one year would not cause her to forget.

He was thinking pleasantly about what he had read in those limpid eyes so often, with a trusting confidence that she would not forget, when his horse suddenly stopped and forced his thoughts back to the present.

There, in front of him, sat the chief Worrogonga, with his back against a tree-trunk and his head drooping in a wearied attitude, as he looked at the horse and rider coming upon him, with a dull gaze and a passive air of indifference.

"Worrogonga, what ails you?" cried Danton, springing from his horse and approaching the naked figure—then he saw that the limbs were clotted with dried blood, and the same dark stains lay on the ground around him.

"You are wounded, Worrogonga."

Worrogonga smiled faintly as he murmured huskily:

"Two days ago; no walk now—sit here and wait till death come."

Danton lifted him from the tree to examine him, finding as he did so that the back of the savage had stuck to the tree, so that he had to be careful; when he succeeded in moving him he saw where the wounds were, one in the upper portion of the hip, and two

more which had struck him in the right side, and edged off; bullet wounds a glance revealed to him which must have bled profusely, although they were now caked over, for the ground was covered with it, and also the roots of the tree.

"God above! who did this, Worrogonga?"

"Your friend—and mine—he come along and make friends with us; then, when we no look out—shoot kill—stab all round—you, maybe, finish up what he leave—good, I no care damn now, since all my people dead."

"Do you mean Wild?"

The savage nodded slowly.

"Come, Worrogonga, you are faint with loss of blood and hunger; take this, and then I'll go with you to your camp."

He hastily unpacked some food, and getting out his flask of spirits and water put it to the lips of the famished and blood-drained savage, who, after drinking, said in a stronger voice:

"No more black fellow camp—all up with them—Worrogonga only left."

"What, did Wild do this by himself?"

"No, plenty bushranger fellow 'long of him in the bush, he come first, make friends, they come after—shoot, shoot all round, then stab and smash all up—I run away with these, and crawl this length, then lie down, beat."

"Where have they gone?"

"All same; these bushrangers go off to the other camps, my friends, and kill—no come back yet—come back bymby, see me here then and finish that job right."

"No, I'll take care they don't; you come with me, Worrogonga, and I'll look after you."

"Ah, white fellow Wild say that same afore he kill —you white fellow friend of his, all same—no matter, Worrogonga no want to live longer now."

The tears rushed into the eyes of Danton as he heard these hopeless tones, while he replied brokenly:

"May God serve me as I shall serve you, Worrogonga, my brother; come to my cave and I will make you strong, and save you from these devils, or else die with you!"

"I go with you white fellow, all same, you make me well, or polish me off, it no matter."

They were not above a mile from the natives' camp, so, after tearing up his shirt into strips, Danton moistened them from his flask and bandaged up the wounds, then raising the exhausted chief in his arms he placed him on his horse, and holding him up, he walked the mile in order to find out if this awful tragedy was true, and if so, to see if there had been no other survivors. If not, at any rate he would be able to get water enough there, at the hole, to wash the wounds, so as to enable Worrogonga to bear the journey to the cave.

It was a great shock to hear this about Wild and his men, and as yet he could hardly credit it, for he had heard him speak about the kindness of these same natives; surely he could not be so bad as to steal upon them in this treacherous manner and massacre them, without some excuse.

Slowly they went forward, Danton guiding the horse carefully so as not to shake that helpless figure on its back, and every now and then, as he saw him

likely to collapse, he gave him another sip from the flask.

Slowly through the close bush, with the sun rays striking hotly upon them between the leaves—not too hot for Worrogonga, who was ice-cold with the loss of blood and drowsy with the weak brandy, so that he would have rolled off only for the arm of his guide. It was like supporting a dead man, so limply he swayed on the saddle, with his head hanging over the horse's neck.

So they passed through the bush and came to the open ground where the water-hole was, and before they reached this Danton knew that the tale was truth from the odour of death which was wafted towards them.

Yes, the camp was like a pest-house, for the dead do not keep long in this season. As they approached the edge of the pond, he could see that the field of slaughter was in possession of the scavengers of the air; gorged vultures and crows covered the ground and made the scene hideous with their wrangling; so lifting his charge from the horse he laid him down on the edge of the swamp, and filling his hat with water poured it over the bandages, then leaving Worrogonga and the horse, he went over to where the camp had been.

It was a sickening and idle task he had set himself to do, for no life remained amongst that putrid and half-devoured humanity; the foul concourse of birds rose as he approached, with bloody beaks, blackening the air with their evil wings and shrieking their anger at this useless interruption. Over a hundred corpses of men, women and children lay there, many of them

already almost reduced to skeletons, for the ants had been as busy as the foul birds; in a few more days it would be a field of dry and polished bones, at present it was horrible.

Faint and giddy he staggered back and lifting the chief once more upon the horse, he went towards the mountains, never turning his head, but holding his nostrils with his fingers and breathing through his mouth—a great horror upon him, mingled with a profound hatred for the wretches who had done this fell deed.

It was sun-down before they reached the cave, and for the rest of the night he occupied himself with Worrogonga, making a soft bed of gum leaves for him in a corner of the cave, and keeping his bandages constantly wet, while between times he cooked some soup.

At last the chief slept, and then James Danton fixed up the doorway with heavy stones, and next, lighting his pipe, he sat down to watch the invalid and think.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE BUSHRANGERS' VISIT.

TWO days sufficed, of careful nursing and generous diet, almost to set the native chief upon his legs. It is positively marvellous how quickly the most gaping of wounds close up and heal on the body of an Australian aboriginal.

Worrogonga was still very weak, and would be lame for the rest of his life, for the pistol bullet was still imbedded in his hip, as James Danton did not possess the surgical skill necessary for extracting it,

but the wound had skinned over and the lacerated flesh of the side where the other two bullets had ploughed was closing fast, and mending under the constant application of the cold water bandages and the medicinal virtues of the eucalyptus leaves upon which he had been laid.

Worrogonga was able to recount the details of the atrocity, and as he did so in his abrupt and quaint, yet graphic manner, the blood of his listener ran cold as he recognised Wildrake's style. It was a deed which could only be compared to some of the acts of the Borgias or of those cultivated monsters who had followed in the track of Nero, feminine almost in its devilish refinement of cruelty, and it made him think if Wildrake could plan out the like of this, what would he be likely to stop at?—and as this consideration passed through his mind, his heart grew chill with fear for himself.

This was not the man to trust or expect any disinterested kindness from; he had been kind to Worrogonga and his tribe while he was planning out their murder; he had been kind to Danton. For what dark purpose had he been so, behind the one he had professed moved him?

And yet he must trust this incarnate demon, for he was in his hands completely, with no one else to trust who could help him out of his trouble. His heart grew very heavy at this helplessness as he thought upon it.

Yet, although hitherto a victim to circumstances, this lawless lover of Helen Craven was not a fool, or one at all likely to sink under his troubles as long as a prospect appeared to exist for him to get out of

them; therefore, now that he knew the nature of the man who was at present the master of his destiny, he felt himself, in a sense, forearmed. He would have to meet this cunning with an equal amount of craft, and by holding out the promise of future profit, make this gastronomic outlaw act fair. His mother was rich enough to purchase the goodwill of Wildrake, therefore he resolved to make him a definite offer that he would pay him a large amount when he got his innocence established, and say nothing to alarm him about this present discovery of his. To do this, he must hide Worrogonga at once, as Wildrake and his gang would most likely visit the cave before they returned to Turro-side.

Therefore, telling his patient his intentions respecting him—which the chief at once saw the wisdom of, and agreed to, for with savages craft is more readily understood than open defiance—he at once set to work and made a rough ladder long enough to reach the first of the ledges, and then he gathered a plentiful supply of fresh leaves, and carrying them up made a comfortable bed here, where he saw it was wide and roomy, and not likely to be seen from below. Worrogonga watched him doing this with interest, showing, by his faith, that, if he had been deceived by other white fellows, he was not altogether a sceptic yet in the honour of the whites.

"I know that place, Ngundu, and where it take to, I have been often before, and will show you when I am better."

"Does it go anywhere?" asked Danton with surprise, for in his casual examination it seemed to be only a break in the cliff.

"Yes, it go all round and down to bigger holes than this, it take me also out to the range if I want. You good fellow, so I no mind showing you all about it; this one of my people's places, with more in it than the bushrangers know—you wait till I can walk."

When the aromatic couch was prepared Danton got Worrogonga on to his back, and with the chief clinging to his neck, he mounted the ladder and placed him safely.

"Do you think you have strength enough to haul up that ladder when they come, Worrogonga?"

"Yes," replied the chief.

After this he prepared and carried up the food which Worrogonga did not refuse to take, as he had refused the feast prepared by Wildrake; it was not so artistically cooked as had been that feast of death, but evidently the wounded man considered it more wholesome for his present state of health.

On the third afternoon, as Danton was at the water-hole filling his bucket, he saw a company of mounted men enter the gully; therefore, hurrying back, he gave the warning to Worrogonga and helped him to hoist up the ladder, then he turned about and waited.

In a few more moments the loud voice of Wildrake was heard outside.

"Within there, Danton, we are friends only."

Then Danton went out, and concealing his disgust as well as he could, made the pseudo-police troop welcome to his camp.

"By Jove, old fellow, you ought to be more careful," said Wildrake as he entered, followed by his men, with their horses one by one. "We saw you at

the water-hole and also spotted you entering at the door there, and it's lucky we weren't the real police after you, otherwise it would have been all up with you and our hiding-place."

Denton muttered something about being off his guard for the moment.

"Well, look out another time and cover yourself in your exits and entrances, as I have got a full description of you from head-quarters, and there may be more on the track. However, here we are, just in time for supper, after a week of hard work. I have loads of stuff with me and will be the cook per usual to-night, so bustle, lads, and get the things unpacked after we have seen to our animals."

Each man looked after his own steed with the pack horses, Wildrake paying particular attention to his beautiful mare, who rewarded him with soft whinnyings and tender rubbings of her velvet mouth, as she turned her head after him and watched his actions with loving eyes.

To Danton as he watched this terrible man fondling his horse and listened to the terms of endearment which he lavished upon her, as he carefully sponged the dirt and dust from her stag-like limbs and satin coat, while she turned her head and rubbed her nose against his neck and cheeks, it seemed almost impossible to realise that he had witnessed his remorseless work in that camp, for Wildrake acted now and used the extravagant terms that a doting lover might with his mistress, touching her so softly and tenderly, and all the while his own black eyes glowed as humidly as were the large, lustrous eyes that followed him. It was a case of mutual affection that could

only have been understood by a bushranger or an Arab.

"My beauty—my heart's treasure, how could I live without her?" were amongst the mildest of the cajolings he used as he tended this faithful and high-bred animal.

Danton glanced up to the ledge where Worrogonga lay, and through the gloom thought he saw a pair of glowing, lurid eyes also watching this maudlin display of sentiment.

"I tell you what, Danton," remarked the Captain, as he raised himself up and leaned fondly against the sleek neck of the mare. "There's no woman worth this mare of mine; it would break the little bit of heart that I have left if anything hurt her, and by Heaven above me I'd torture the man, as Red Indian never did his enemy, who caused her a pang. When Sally goes I don't care how soon I hang afterwards, and that's more than I'd do for any other female."

Again Danton glanced instinctively up to the ledge and slightly shivered.

"Now for my next task, and only one request I want to make, and that is, perfect silence while I operate, for I want a proper feed to-night to take some nasty tastes out of my mouth."

While the horses fed contentedly in their portion of the cavern, and the men, wearied with their long ride, lay at their ease on the floor in various attitudes, this enthusiastic and indefatigable gastronome worked like a galley-slave, with his prime ministers, Hickey Black, Rory Murdoch and Sam Belger, to produce a *chef d'œuvre* of a supper. It was no native eccentricity this time, but a set of courses such as might

have delighted the *habitués* of the *Café Anglais*, supposing the genius of that *café* was circumscribed in his materials, and therefore had to put forth a larger effort.

Never had his men seen their chief so intent and concentrated in his labours; he worked like a man who was creating his last supper, or an actor who was resolved to excel himself on his farewell appearance; was he planning out something extra big, or crushing out of his mind a calamity?

"Boys," he said at length, after two hours' hard work, "I have made a feed worthy of Napoleon, and I am wearied. Hickey, Rory, Sam, wait on us and serve, for I want to gorge this night with my friend, Danton."

For the life of him James Danton could not decline that repast, for it was exquisite, however abominable the cook may have been in his other actions, so after the two had gone down to one of the water-holes and washed, they returned and sat down to enjoy themselves.

There was not much talking during this supper, for Wildrake held that the duties of eating and drinking were quite enough for a true gastronome to undertake at such times, and for himself he seemed resolved to let nothing interfere with his present devotion, for he hardly raised his eyes from his plate and never uttered a word till the last dish had been removed.

It bore an eastern appearance this repast, for the ground had to serve for a table; on this, however, a table-cloth was spread, round which the men sat tailor fashion, lighted up by the fire which burned at one side of the cave, while the smoke rolled away within

the ledges; there were some candles also stuck on flat blocks of wood, and these also served to illuminate the party.

After supper, while the tobacco was being consumed, Wildrake began to speak about different topics, poetry and plays which he had seen in the old country. He was cheerful and discursive in his reminiscences, and drew Danton gently out on the subjects that interested him, proving himself to be a good listener as well as an intelligent talker, so that, but for the uncouth surroundings, and the brutal faces of most of the company, they might have been at a refined club, so easily and smoothly the conversation flowed

After the first cigar, however, and when he had lit his pipe and poured out a glass of brandy for himself, he brought the talk to the present.

"We have been having an uncommonly stiff time of it lately, Danton, dispersing the natives."

"I thought they were good friends of yours," replied Danton, a little gruffly.

"Yes, but I could not help myself. We had definite instructions to scatter them, as they were combining and threatening the settlers. I was forced, much against my will, to take our countrymen's side; however, I did the work as mercifully as I could for the sake of old times. The coloured man must succumb before the advance of the white, and I think I have shown them the uselessness of a farther struggle. We had five tribes to disperse, and we have done so; after this there will be peace."

"Was there much blood shed?"

"Not much; we lost four of our trackers and a few

of the others slightly wounded, but this is apart from what I came this way about. Have you got your home-letter ready?"

"Yes, it is here, you may read it," replied Danton, producing the letter and handing it to the other, who scanned it over and then closed it.

"That ought to do the trick—well, I am going down to Perth with Mr. Craven next week, and I'll see that it goes off by the first mail from there."

"You are very good, Wildrake, and I have only got to say that when my innocence is established, I shall be in a position to give you five thousand pounds for the trouble you have taken with me; don't mind me offering you this, for you will require all the money you can get when you reach another country, so if you will allow me, I will give you now a promissory note for that amount."

"For myself, Danton, I'd refuse this generosity on your part, for what I have done or may yet do for you, has been for friendship pure and simple," answered Wildrake earnestly. "But, as you say, money will be required for those who are with me, if we mean to live respectable lives, so I accept your offer in the same spirit of comradeship that it is given."

"Thank you, Wildrake, I have the note here ready for you; it is dated eighteen months from now, as that will give me time to hear from my mother, if you send off that letter without delay."

"It will go by the first ship after I reach Perth, you may depend."

"I have also a few lines which I'd like you to give to Miss Craven; you may have a chance of letting her have it without her knowing who was the post-

man. Read it also, I still keep up the hateful name of Shafton for your sake."

"I'm glad you have written that note, it will ease her mind, poor girl, for she is terribly gone on you, Danton, my boy, and a little hope goes a long way with a maid in love."

After some further conversation about Helen and the future, during which the Captain comforted the exile greatly with the account of Turro-side, the company stretched themselves out on the ground to have a few hours' sleep.

Next morning they were off at daybreak, Wildrake again promising faithfully to fulfil all his obligations, and then when Danton had watched the last of them, from the entrance, safely disappear down the gully, he turned to attend to his patient.

But Worrogonga did not reply to him when he called, and thinking him still asleep, Danton set to work making breakfast so as to be ready when the poor fellow woke up.

This occupied him for a considerable time, and then he resolved to have a wash before shouting again up to the ledge, so taking his towel and soap he went to the bathing water-hole, and stripping himself, dived in and had a most refreshing bath. While he was rubbing himself, he chanced to look down the gully, and was greatly surprised to see the wounded chief come limping up from the bush beyond; indeed so astonished was he that he stood gaping at the black figure as if he had been a ghost.

"Hallo, Worrogonga, how have you got here?

"I watch all night, that bushranger, and go out the

way I know, to follow him, he all same bad man to you."

"How do you know this?"

"You gave him papers to take for you—ah, I watch him tear them up after he got into the bush, and fling them away. See, I bring some of them back!"

He produced some scraps of paper which Danton quickly saw were portions of the letter he had given to Wildrake for Helen Craven and his mother.

"The false-hearted scoundrel!" he exclaimed, with an oath.

"Yes, he damned white fellow that, you bet," replied Worrogonga, calmly. "But you make other papers and Worrogonga will take them safely for you. Worrogonga know now how to hurt white fellow, Wild, and he do it, bymby."

But Danton did not hear these words, for he stood now by the edge of the pool, thinking deeply, while the morning sun lit up his naked body with a rosy glow.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### UNCLE TIMOTHY SEES SOME STRANGE THINGS.

CAPTAIN WILDRAKE and his merry gang had a grateful reception on their return to Turro-side, for the tidings of their exploits travelled before them, and most of the settlers about that part of the country had ridden down to thank the leader for his successful efforts in their behalf, and to congratulate the squatter magistrate on his good fortune in securing such an active and able man.

"Wildrake, you have begun well, and we all owe

you our most grateful thanks," said Mr. Craven, as he greeted the young man warmly. "But I wish you had also run to earth that new gang of desperadoes who have cropped up since you punished the others. Here have three stations been attacked and robbed while you were after the natives, and the sufferers have come down with full descriptions. It appears that this convict, James Danton, makes no secret of his name, when he and his fellows stick up a station, and, from all accounts, it appears to be the same scoundrel who is here described in the police sheets, whom I foolishly asked you to spare."

"We have already been after this Danton pack, but have not come up to them," replied Wildrake, "and only that I had promised to accompany you to Perth, and because my eyes have been troubling me for the last day or so, I'd have stayed out longer. However, my lieutenant will go out during our absence and do what he can."

"Your eyes bad? A touch of sun-blight. Wear a pair of blue glasses until the inflammation goes," said the squatter.

"But I haven't got a pair of blue glasses unfortunately," answered the Captain.

"I have a couple of pairs of first-class glasses, so come and I'll give you a pair at once."

Wildrake's eyelids were much inflamed and red, so that this timely gift came in most opportunely, and when he put them on they made a great alteration in his appearance, for there is nothing that disguises a man so completely as coloured spectacles. The squatter laughed as he looked at him with them on and cried:

"The young women of Perth may congratulate themselves that those wicked black eyes of yours are for the time under eclipse, Wildrake. You look harmless enough now."

The Captain smiled gently, but did not reply to this pleasantry on the part of his host, and then shortly afterwards he went over to have a little friendly chat with the sumptuously-attired Timothy, who had tried to evade this hero of the hour as much as possible since his return.

Mr. Craven was holding open house on this Saturday before his departure for the town of Perth, and he was as happy as a hospitable Irishman could be who finds plenty of friends around him to share at his board. All the bedrooms were occupied, and the large dining-room table had to be elongated to its fullest extent in order to accommodate the swarm of welcome guests who had taken his place *en route*, also for Town, in true colonial fashion. They were all going down to the markets, and for a week or two of gaiety, and were in boisterous spirits. Even the ones who had been "stuck up" by the bushrangers had cast such unavoidable cares aside for the present, and one and all united in making a lion of the man who had rid them of the natives, and one lot of outlaws; and they felt, as they looked at his quiet air of self-possession, that he would soon make the district a safe one—for they did not need any fuller information than he had already given about the dispersing operations, to know that those tribes nearest to them had been finished off, and that their sheep could now camp out at night in comparative safety.

Helen had been fretting a good deal since the

departure of her undeclared lover—over her inability to plan out anything for his safety. She had been expecting a letter or message of some kind from him, and this silence troubled her sorely, although it did not shake her faith in him ; but it made her look pale and anxious, and forced her to watch this much-extolled hero very closely. If she could only get somehow in touch with the absent one, some plan then might suggest itself. Meantime, she was suspicious and perplexed, although she was compelled to conceal her worry from the knowledge of her father's visitors.

But if Helen hid her misery, there was small attempt at concealment on the part of Uncle Timothy. He wore the borrowed clothes with the air of a serf airing his fetters, and although his shirts were stiffly enough starched, yet all the starch was completely out of his limp and slender person. While Wildrake was absent he had adopted a kind of false courage and jauntiness, for he lived in hopes that some accident would cut off this energetic person, but now he was back again safe and victorious, Timothy became abject in his feeble terror.

He saw Wildrake approach him, and made a futile attempt to engage a gentleman in conversation, but at the first playful touch of the master's hand on his coat-cuff, he collapsed completely.

"That's a neat bit of stuff, Timothy ; never saw a neater fit, and the vest, by Jove, is a masterpiece ; I must get to know your tailor—colonial, I hope, eh?"

"No," replied Timothy huskily. "Damn colonial tailors ; I get my clothes direct from London."

"So I would suppose," said Wildrake, smiling sweetly,

Timothy looked at him with a furtive hatred in his blood-shot eyes, mingled with deadly fear. This tormentor of his was always complimenting him on his clothes, and sizing them up in this disagreeable way, showing such deuced bad taste altogether, that he wished the bushrangers had taken him off, instead of the reverse being the case. He would have felt much easier even with a bushranger than with this representative of the law for ever keeping him under surveillance.

"Well, Timothy, and how have you been since I saw you last?"

"Not at all well."

"Too much tip-tilting of the little finger, and too little attention to the solids—you are foolish, my friend. All the same, I hope you have managed to take what you promised."

"Yes! I took it."

"Good; I'll have a chat with you after on that subject; I'll see you to your bedroom to-night, so that we can get it settled."

Timothy had always regarded the man to whom he was indebted as a low-bred cad and enemy, not at all an uncommon state of mind with gentlemen who run recklessly into debt. Any form of reminding him of his obligations would have been ill-timed, offensive and beastly low, but this constant trick of twitching at his borrowed vest and coat-collar, and forcing him to utter such glaring lies before people was doubly offensive, and yet he dare not show the hauteur or indignation that woke in his proud, old-blooded breast, but had to vulgarly "grin and bear it."

"Good boy! Ta ta! for the present," murmured

Wildrake pleasantly, as he turned away to relate his recent adventures to a young lady, who at that moment took his arm.

"Beastly snob!" muttered Timothy, very much under his breath though, as he piloted his way towards the sideboard where the decanters stood, feeling that he strictly required a pick-me-up after this degrading knock-him-down!

For the rest of the evening, while the ladies were present, Timothy hovered about that sideboard, glaring through his eye-glass on the company generally, while he eyed furtively the movements of his master, who allowed himself to be flattered by the ladies on his bravery, and complimented by the men, yet bore it all with a quiet modesty that was not at all colonial. He was a good deal disfigured by those coloured spectacles, behind which his eyes were totally hidden, but as sun-blight was a common enough complaint, no one minded that much.

Helen complimented him also on his exploits, for it seemed all right and proper to her for the aboriginals to be dispersed, and he was satisfied in replying with a few common-place expressions, for he was a patient hunter and did not mean to frighten his game; when he returned from Perth he would have an opportunity of being more friendly. Meantime he reckoned up the eligibles amongst the company present, and did not have much fear about any of them; none of them were at all likely to wipe out the impression which the Hon. Percy Shafton had made; that would be his pleasant task when he returned.

He laughed softly when Helen spoke to him about this Danton, the bushranger, while he promised her

that he would do his best to wipe him out when he came back. Her unconsciousness tickled his fancy greatly. Yes, he would destroy Danton when he had no further use for his name as a blind, as he had done the natives, but not yet, until the rest of these gentlemen present had been laid under contribution for the amusement and profit of his own boys; then, when he was ready to leave this colony he would produce the corpse of the outlaw and claim the reward, which he meant should yet be a good one by reason of that party's future exploits.

Like the squatter, the bush ladies kept early hours, and soon the gentlemen had liberty to go into the billiard room with their pipes and glasses, and here, after a few games and repeated refreshments, they also adjourned to their respective bedrooms, leaving Timothy to the care of the Captain.

"One more peg only, Timothy, and then let us get to your chamber, where we can arrange matters comfortably," said the Captain briskly, as the last of the visitors sauntered out.

Timothy obeyed orders with his customary sulky air of injury, and then allowed his owner to lead him to his room; here, after the Captain had locked the door and bolted the window, he turned and addressed the poor victim sternly:

"Timothy Craven, you are an ingrate; I have observed your attitude towards me this evening, and it was the reverse of friendly. Am I to consider that you regret my indulgence?"

"No, Wildrake, you mistake my manner utterly. I feel nothing but gratitude towards you, but I've had a beastly toothache for the past few days, and even

the best-tempered man must be excused if he doesn't look particularly pleasant, with such a complaint."

"Well, I'll put it down to toothache, but I must confess it wounded me a bit. Now, my boy, you say you got that cheque all right?"

"Yes."

"And signed it, I trust?"

"Yes."

"Produce it, then, and I'll tell you how to fill it up."

The elderly gentleman went over to his desk, and with a shaking hand, he opened and drew out the cheque, which Wildrake took from him, and then, bringing out his own pocket-book, he got out the cheque which Mr. Craven had given him in exchange for the order of the Hon. Percy Shafton, and keenly compared the two signatures, taking off his glasses so as to see better.

"Devilish good imitation, Timothy. I did not think it was in you to do such a neat piece of work. Now, then, fill it up for—say eight thousand pounds."

"Heavens, man! you are jesting with me. Eight thousand pounds!"

"Yes—the amount doesn't matter, since I shall only present it if you grow too nasty towards me, and it's all the same to you whether it is eight thousand or only eight pounds, so be quick, or I'll wash my hands of you, without further parley."

"It's awful," groaned the trapped old gentleman, as he sat down and made out the amount in a fair imitation of his brother's caligraphy.

"Now, Timothy, fix your own name on the back."

That also was done, and after it had been blotted

the Captain placed the two cheques together in his pocket-book, and buttoned his coat over them carefully.

"Well, Timothy, you can enjoy yourself now, only no sulking after this with your benefactor, for I don't want the people to think there is any disagreement between us. I am off to bed, for I haven't been between sheets for the past fortnight, and I want to take it out of them this night. I'll see you to-morrow. Ta! ta!"

When the Captain left him, Timothy again locked his door, and from the cupboard brought out a fresh bottle of brandy. This he uncorked cautiously, and while a drop of it remained he stuck to it—drinking, bewailing his luck, and cursing bitterly the devil who had enthralled him. Then, as he sucked in the last drop, he staggered over to his bed, and flinging himself down without undressing, he was quickly asleep, and for the time, oblivious of his woes.

The next morning Timothy, having exceeded even his quantity, felt badly. His nerves were a tangle of vibrations out of harmony, so that ordinary sounds struck upon his brains like sledge-hammers, and produced the most excruciating agony. Therefore, he was compelled to keep to his bed, and instead of breakfast, have another bottle of brandy brought to him, with innumerable bottles of soda-water.

He was not missed, however, at the breakfast-table by any one, for he was not at all popular with the gentlemen, therefore no one enquired after him; so, while the others rode over to the meeting-house to listen to Mr. Richard Craven's reading of a sermon, as politeness required them to do, this interesting

invalid lay tossing about his rumpled bed and cursed creation.

By and by, when he had swallowed sufficient alcohol to make him reckless of those awful sledge-hammer sounds that crashed upon his brains, he got up and dressed himself, cutting his face severely as he tried to shave. Then he slunk into the dining-room and abstracting two more bottles of brandy from the side-board, he went out for a solitary walk, accompanied not only by the same outrageous noises, but by some other ugly customers besides.

He had never seen so many snakes about the station as he saw that afternoon, nor such curiously-coloured specimens. Very pretty they were as to hue, but their heads were hideous, and they had a nasty habit of appearing and disappearing in the most unaccountable fashion, which was very annoying.

"I must speak to my brother about these nuisances," he muttered. "There must be some way surely of getting rid of them."

He found, after a few experiments, that a good swig at the brandy-bottle generally sent them out of sight for a time, so he wandered on and swigged often.

But they came back again, and at each fresh appearance assumed more gigantic proportions. Pythons some of them appeared to be—blue, green and scarlet pythons, with demoniac heads that rose up against him and grinned mockingly in his face.

One enormous fellow got nearest to him and could hardly be driven off. It was jet black, with a face like Wildrake's, and wore dark blue glasses. Several times he aimed at this monster with the empty bottle

and his cane, without being able to hit it; it dodged about so. In vain he fixed his eyeglass and glared at it so as to be sure of his next stroke, his weapons always missed the mark.

At last he tried to run away from it, after flinging the empty bottle at the enemy with the same result as before. He was in front of it, but it was rushing after him, and in its wake eight or ten thousand other small snakes of the same species of Wildrake. Then the poor old gentleman lost his head completely and with the shrill yell of a maniac he dashed wildly through the bush.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### WILDRAKE PURCHASES "THE MARIA."

THE inhabitants of Perth led a merry life about this time, for their calamities had not come upon them, and they were living on their capital in a way that looked like prosperity.

Wages were exorbitantly high, and even the workmen spent their earnings with a lavishness as if things were fated to go on always at this rate. They bought luxuries from the other colonies and England, and spared themselves in nothing that they could purchase. They produced little or nothing to recoup this reckless expenditure and already had drifted heavily into debt, without making any effort to meet their liabilities or curtail their own expenses.

Balls, pic-nics and parties were the order of the day, so that when the squatters, who were alone making solid fortunes, came down to their yearly sales,

the townsmen turned out to give them a proper welcome, and things were very lively and gay indeed.

Officers from the ships which brought relays of convicts or provisions, officials from the prisons, government men, and people coming from India for their health—for Western Australia had already gained a reputation for its glorious climate—all combined to give the town a festive air; as they were here on a holiday and to spend money, and as their position was mostly well known, and the residents were fond of any excuse for getting up a party, they were made welcome at once and introduced all round.

Therefore, when Wildrake came down with Mr. Craven and the other wool owners, he had no reason to complain of neglect, for the two surviving Denvers brothers had carried the news of his first exploit, and the squatters spread his after services in highly-coloured terms through the town, so that he was everywhere received as an ornament to the young colony, as well as sought after for his other social qualifications.

The Governor of the time congratulated him on his energy and ratified his appointment as a government official. Mr. Craven introduced him to the bank into which he paid Mr. Craven's cheque, and the reward for the extinction of the Wild gang; he reserved Mr. Timothy's forgery for a future occasion, when he would pay in the second cheque from Mr. Craven, and perhaps some more of his own working. But these he would manage gradually, having about ten months before him to do it in, and when the banker told him in a burst of confidence that he

was proud to deal with a friend of Mr. Craven, who could afford to drop his hundred thousand pounds, he rejoiced exceedingly, for he intended taking several trips down to Perth during the next nine months and have a good many dealings with that friendly banker, so that he cultivated his acquaintance a great deal, and also returned that gentleman's confidence by telling him that he expected his own remittances from home shortly, which he would get Mr. Craven to take up and give him cheques for instead.

"As I have said, we can honour Mr. Craven's cheques up to a hundred—nay, nearer two hundred thousand pounds, Captain Wildrake; therefore that he has introduced you is quite enough for us," repeated the banker.

"This is a glorious country," said Wildrake. "With a great future before it, of that I am convinced from what I have seen, so I have written home to ask my solicitors to see about selling out all my invested property which I mean to speculate in land here."

"You could not do better," replied the banker warmly.

"I suppose a man with forty or fifty thousand pounds of his own, which is too little to live in comfort on the interest in England, would do well in land here?"

"He would be a millionaire in ten years' time," said the banker solemnly. "That is where our owners are handicapped; at the most they come here with ten or twelve thousand, so that they are not able to launch out properly, and therefore have to get on by degrees, but with such a capital as you mention, a man can achieve anything—if properly advised, of course."

"That is all I expect to reap from my little patrimony unless the home market is very brisk," returned the Captaid. "Sixty or sixty-five thousand at most will be about the figure, and of course I'll make you my adviser before I speculate."

As Wildrake intended, his *modest* fortune and colonial intentions, were soon common property throughout the fashionable portion of Perth, so that he was treated with marked respect and every house thrown open to him. He made a good many conquests also amongst the fair sex by his agreeable manners, and as his friend the banker let him into a few bank secrets, he soon knew who were the really substantial people in the colony, and as a business young man devoted himself to them. A banker, a lawyer, a physician and a ritualist priest are supposed to be very careful about the confidences reposed in them, but there are not the same terrors hanging over their heads, or souls, as hang over a poor priest of Rome.

Captain Wildrake, during his pleasant sojourn in Perth, did not pay so much attention to the daughters of rich men as he did to the widows whom his friend, the banker, informed him were to be safely trusted; rich fathers generally prove too inquisitive, but with rich, free and independent widows the case is different; they have no guardians to look after them, and generally like to consult their own hearts in such affairs, so that the gallant Captain confined his attentions strictly to the widows.

Yet, on the whole, he was remarkably modest on this first visit to the capital of Western Australia. He was not going to be in a hurry to fix upon a life-

long partner, yet like a skilful young rector, he managed his flirtations so as to give all the moneyed women hopes, and raise a tender interest and expectancy in each mature and independent bosom, so that the competition was hot, for in spite of his present weak eyes, he was a most fascinating fellow and found an occasion for each of them to look privately into those jetty and magnetic orbs. Altogether he managed his game remarkably well with those susceptible females of Western Australia.

At the hotels as in the private houses he was much in request, for he could tell a racy story in the smoke-room, or help the host to entertain his guests, and was altogether so unassuming, that he managed to escape raising any jealousy or making a single enemy, a very difficult thing to escape in any part of Australia, as a stranger; so overpowering and gushing are they at the first, and so deadly in their rancour afterwards, that they resemble nothing so much as a mean man who has been trapped into spending a shilling without reaping any advantage out of it.

They are so intensely business-like, these colonials, and so impressionable, that they are for ever losing their heads and regretting the loss afterwards, and perpetually running into all kinds of extravagances of love and hatred, as robust young people and young colonists will; they cannot get the reserve and caution of the old hands.

Captain Wildrake did only one foolish action, according to his friend the banker, during his stay in Perth, and that was to purchase a schooner from a sandal-wood trader, who had come into the port dead broke. The schooner was a fifty-ton vessel, and as

smart and seaworthy a craft as the American market could furnish; she had only done three voyages amongst the South Seas and had no faults, yet it was a foolish thing for a man to do, who had a post up country, and could only visit the Swan River three or four times a year, but he explained that he had an idea of exploring the coast during his holidays and meant to train his men to be sailors as well as policemen.

"I have my own ideas about the South Sea trade also," he said, "and fancy I can do something there." Therefore he struck a good bargain with the owner, considering the character of the vessel, bought him out for everything for three hundred and fifty pounds, and settled in hard cash, drawing only seventy pounds from the bank and paying the rest in gold of his own.

This done, he gave orders for the schooner to be docked and properly seen to against his next visit to Perth, when he would bring down some of his men who had served as sailors, to look after her. She was called *The Maria*, and he did not alter her name.

He spent a good deal of his time at the bank with his friend, the principal, who showed him all the strong rooms and safes so that he might not be at all nervous about his deposits.

"There are some desperate and clever convicts amongst us, but you see we take all precautions against them. I sleep on the premises myself and besides, have three patrols fully armed on watch here at night."

"Ah, it seems safe enough as banks go," replied Wildrake, looking round him with some interest. "I suppose you keep a good deal of metal here?"

"Yes, with current accounts such as yours, we retain it all, for the customers may make a call at any time."

"You can protect yourself, I reckon, if attacked?"

"No, I never handled a pistol in my life," replied the bank manager with charming frankness. "But outsiders don't know that, of course, so that is my protection; it is given out that I am a demon of a shot, and that very fictitious character does the trick."

"And you will be able to keep it up so long as you don't attend the shooting gallery."

"That I never do—on principle," returned the banker with a laugh.

Wildrake also laughed, very heartily.

Once he went over the prisons and Rottnest with Mr. Craven and the others, and looked attentively at the arrangements, but asked no questions, and as it was a very bright day he wore his spectacles, indeed, it was seldom he went without them while in Perth. The officials did not heed him much and the convicts never looked up from their tasks. Afterwards he remarked that he was much impressed with the perfect discipline.

The Governor had only been four months in the country, and most of his aide-de-camps and attendants had come with him, and at Government House Captain Wildrake soon became a privileged favourite; altogether he had nothing to complain about as to treatment, for each man and woman tried to show him what nice people they were, and how comfortable he'd find this flourishing young colony to live in.

Amongst the company who met to honour him was the Governor of the Island of Rottnest, a brandy-

loving, pimply-visaged and genial fellow, who had been there for the last five years, besides having a long experience in Tasmania, and who made it his boast that he never forgot the face of a criminal who had once been through his hands. He was particularly anxious to know all about the running down of Derrick Wild and his gang.

"I'd know that chap amongst a thousand," said the Governor. "For he was my cook, and devilish good dishes he made too."

"You have a weakness for cooking, haven't you, Captain?" remarked Mr. Craven.

"Yes. I have studied it in the best schools in Europe," calmly replied Wildrake, "and if I had known this outlaw had the same proclivities, I'd have brought him in alive."

"I don't know about your cooking, but I missed Wild when he cut his stick," continued the governor, fixing his eyes on the Captain, "for I haven't had a satisfactory meal since, and I feel grateful to him for the treats I have enjoyed, blackguard though he was."

"You like a good meal then, Governor?"

"Don't I just?"

"I must give you a specimen of my skill some day," said the Captain easily.

"This Wild was an uncommonly intelligent fellow, although homicidally inclined, with a good figure, not unlike your own, only he had a heavier jowl, and a blue mark across his cheek, with two front teeth missing."

"That description exactly fits the man I shot up Turro-side way, strong-made, spare in flesh, heavy-

jowled, with a blue mark across the left cheek, and two front teeth missing."

"That is Derrick Wild exactly," replied the Governor after a full sip of his glass, and then the conversation changed to some other point of interest.

One day as Wildrake was walking along the beach, he met a lag who had got his ticket-of-leave; this man's wife had come out after him and hired him out to help her to keep a store and beer-shop. When he saw Wildrake he stopped for a moment and gave him a wink.

"Well, old pal, you're plucky and no mistake; come to my shanty and have a drink."

The Captain hesitated a moment, and then said:

"Is it near by, Tom?"

"Yes, no one will see you. I spotted you the first day you came in."

The Captain followed the ex-convict, and when they were safely seated with some brandy between them, said:

"How ever did you know me, Tom?"

"Never mind, no one else does as yet, and I won't peach, so that it's made worth my while. I saw you bargain for that wessel and spotted your game."

"Will you stick to me, Tom?"

"You bet, if you're the same old card."

"Right, you've been a sailor?"

"I have a captain's certificate in my bunk and can take you anywhere," replied the landlord of the shanty.

"Well, Tom, I intend to do something big before I go."

"You have all the boys with you?"

"Every man Jack, and I mean to bag enough to live comfortably in South America, the lot of us, so if you can steer us over there, Tom, I'll make you skipper of that craft."

"I'm your man, boss, leave that craft for me to look after, and I'll see her properly fitted for a long voyage. When do you mean to start?"

"Not for the next eight months, yet she must be ready at a moment's notice."

"I'll look after all that, so you give me money enough to go on with."

"You'll have a couple of hundred to-morrow, old boy, to go on with, and next time I come, a crew to man her, and take her round to Shark's Bay."

"That'll suit me exactly, for I'm sick of this place."

"Share and share alike, you know, Tom, only I don't want any more partners, if I can help it."

"I'll look after your interests, you bet, on these terms. By George! I was surprised when I heard that Wild was wiped out."

With another drink the two men parted, and Captain Wildrake went back very thoughtfully to town to attend a fashionable pic-nic.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### LOVE'S FIRST KISS.

AT Turro-side Station affairs were conducted on an economical and quiet system, when the master was away, for Mrs. Craven, like the true woman she was, did not care for company during the absence of her husband, and this reminds the author that the conclusion he has been forced to come to, after many

years of watching the peculiarities of the different sexes, is that woman must be considered far and away beyond any comparison to be the best animal in every respect of the two.

He does not claim this to be a discovery on his part, neither does he air it out of any desire to conciliate this better, and—as the beneficent Creator so wisely ordered—this largest half of humanity. No, he grudges giving them this paltry meed of justice, and gives it with an unwilling snarl, for he feels almost as bitter against them as the gifted authoress of *Puck* can do, fancying in his own selfish egotism that he has wrongs and experiences enough to make a Diogenes or a Timon of him, and trying his hardest to conceal from himself that it may after all be a case of sour grapes with him instead of acquired philosophy. But he must indulge in no more mirror-gazing, or tub-squatting, or he will become sour and not be able to interest the reader in two very charming and womanly women.

Uncle Timothy, the sole representative of the *nobler* sex who could keep these ladies company at the deserted station-house, was having a very bad time of it at present and therefore took up a great deal of their leisure as well as most undeserved sympathy, for that is where women always come out the strongest and the most inconsistent, for they will make more fuss, like the angels, over one black or useless sheep than over ninety-nine wholesome and healthy muttons.

He had been absent two days and nights on that snake-hunt, before he was discovered in a most exhausted condition by one of the outlying shepherds,

and brought back, tied hand and foot, a weakened yet howling maniac. He was carried indoors, undressed and washed by tender hands, and carefully strapped down to his bed, where he had been since kept with the aid of bromide of potassium, opium, digitalis and aconite, varied with soothing words, soft fingers, cold water towels, and strong beef-tea, and, as yet, his enemies would not be driven away.

While the author was wandering amongst men much given to the rites of hospitality, he saw many different phases of this omnipercipience, which may be bestowed at any moment upon the industrious devotee of this ancient lore, or black magic, for there can be no more potent form of conjuring up the devil, than this liquid and spirituous mode, and, once raised, *he* is very hard to lay; therefore, like the professors of old, the author would strongly advise and warn all disciples, before they begin this most interesting but highly dangerous study, to pause and consider it all out carefully first, with its probable consequences.

Of course, all believers in a future state feel assured that we are surrounded on every side by forces of Nature, beneficent and malign, that, in fact, while we inhabit the flesh, we are moving through this world like men, or horses with bandages over our eyes, blinders put over our vision, so that we may not be horrified or shy aside at the sight of the strange beings and elementals that surround us; for, if we saw them, only the few gifted with supernatural courage could retain their reason. Every word we utter, every thought that flashes through our muddled brains, each act, ignoble or worthy, which we do is witnessed by a crammed theatre of spectators. As

Shakespeare wisely writes: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."

We have got used to the idea that God sees us, and find consolation in the thought that He is all merciful and forgiving, but it isn't nice to consider that myriads of our predecessors and friends are also watching our dirty tricks, and speaking about them, that countless hosts of angels are wondering at them and legions of devils are gloating over them, and getting strength from them; it is like throwing the electric light upon a stage with a full house watching a murder or the preliminaries to a divorce.

Were those prophets of the past mad, we wonder, those pythonesses, witches and wise men and women? Are those inmates of our asylums, who see such strange horrors, mad, or is it that they have got their eyes opened, while the *sane* (?) are still walking along confident and easy, because they have got their blinders up?

Lately the author had a conversation on alternate nights with a spiritualistic medium and a medical man about this matter, which was taking it from two extreme and opposite points.

A curious coincidence with these men was that both had begun life as Roman Catholics. The Vatican decree, I think it was, that finished the spiritualist with Rome, and drove him into atheism for a time; the anatomical and scientific schools finished up the doctor.

The spiritualist, who had been given too great a task in the way of belief, had progressed by stages of doubt to see, or believe he saw, those who walked in the spirit on earth; he discussed each as they entered the

room, and said that public houses swarmed with ugly, lizard-like things. He never indulged in uncle Timothy's mode of incantation, yet, like uncle Timothy, he was able to see the snakes, so perhaps they are there after all, real and visible to those who can see them.

The doctor pooh-poohed everything outside of natural science, would not believe in unseen forces of Nature, or the power for good and evil one may exercise upon another, yet he owned that he always had a *presentiment* when anything good or evil was about to happen to him, and also had passed through some experiences which puzzled him extremely. Who has not had these experiences, if they would but speak of them, as Madame Blavatsky closes the first volume of "The Secret Doctrine" with the significant quotation from Montesquieu's "Lettres Persanes"—"By opening so freely their lunatic asylums to their supposed madmen, men only seek to assure each other that they are not themselves mad."

From the medical point of looking at these matters, uncle Timothy was very dangerously mad just now. From the spiritualist's standpoint, he had rendered himself extremely sensitive and clairvoyant, so that the ordinary blinders were down and his startled eyes were witnessing sights which his little head could not stand.

If he had been gifted with any humour, his visions might have afforded him great amusement; at one time the author saw a man who was sitting laughing as heartily as any one could at a screaming farce, while he watched and described the comic little devils at their merry capers, and to have such a vision as

this, was almost worth going through a long training, but uncle Timothy had no humour, therefore his visitors came to him like persecutors and enemies, who forced him to yell out with horror and agony when the bromide was not forcing him to weep and drivel.

He was not aware of the tender hands and gentle voices of those pitying angels who were doing their utmost to drive away the malignant forces, and if he had been, he would only have taken these services, as he had taken favours all his life, gracelessly and as his due, but he had now penetrated past visible nature, so that *it* was invisible to him, and entered into a state where he had to do all the fighting for himself, and only desperation nerved on his cowardly soul for the unceasing contest.

"I am afraid his brains are not strong enough to stand this strain much longer, as his body is too much debilitated for me to dose him as the paroxysms require," said the doctor gloomily, as he listened to the wild ravings of this wrestler with demons.

"He has worked hard for them, and got them very bad; a few days more will decide his future, I fear."

"And what will that be, doctor?" enquired Mrs. Craven anxiously.

"Either that he will sink under, or else become a hopeless imbecile. Feed him up as well as you can with beef-tea, and as much cold water to his head as possible, that's all you can do meantime."

So uncle Timothy went through the different stages of mad fury, savage grappling, abject terror and whimpering appeals for mercy, presenting a horrible spectacle to his nurses, while they took

turns to watch and tend him, Helen by day and her mother by night, courageous in their actions, but with their hearts chilled with fear as they listened to the awful descriptions and blasphemies which the sufferer so incessantly poured out.

Mrs. Craven resolutely shut her ears to those ravings or revelations, but Helen listened and thought deeply upon some of them.

She heard over and over the account of that midnight transaction about the clothes, and a great deal about the forged cheque; and what her mother considered to be pure imagination, not worthy the repeating or remembering, Helen believed to be the truth and no fancy, because it gave her the key she was wanting to that hateful mystery, Captain Wildrake. She was beginning to understand him better through uncle Timothy, and what an unscrupulous villain he was, and her heart grew very heavy with dread for the absent man whose real name she was in ignorance of, but whom she loved so utterly.

"If I only knew his name, if I only knew his name, then I might help him," she murmured one moonlight night as she was standing by the side gate, taking the air before going to bed.

At that moment she started violently and almost screamed out, brave as she was, as she saw a tall, semi-dressed aboriginal standing beside her. It was Worrogonga.

"Hushy, missey! I want speak to you, 'bout white fellow you know."

"What white fellow?" she asked, recovering herself.

"Same white fellow went away from you last moon; he send me with paper, he want see you also, he no far from here all same."

"Give me the paper."

Worrogonga handed to her a small twisted note, which she unfolded and read with a beating heart, for although it was only written in pencil, it was short and the moon was bright enough to read it by.

"DEAR MISS CRAVEN—I have much to explain to you, and you can trust the bearer of this. I am waiting at your cave, if you can trust yourself to come to me. Let me know. From him you have known as Percy Shafton."

"Go back, and tell white fellow, I shall come to-night—you understand me?—to-night."

"Yes, all same," answered Worrogonga, limping away at once into the shadow of some trees, while Helen rapidly moved towards the house.

At last she was about to get at the truth and satisfy the curiosity of her love, which had almost become morbid in its keen intensity; he would tell her who he was and how she could help him before that great white moon had faded into the morning light.

"Oh, bright moon, how I love you this night," she exclaimed, as she looked up at the great whiteness which spread its lustre over the earth. "My love has not forgotten me after all; he has come back sooner than I expected, and you shall light up his dear face for me to look upon, good moon—dear moon, that changes the earth to heaven!"

With such sentiments rioting in her young heart, it was not to be expected that Helen Craven would be in a very judicial mood this night over anything she might chance to hear from her lover, so long as he was only fond enough and tender enough in the telling of it.

There would be no difficulty about her getting away, for her mother was with uncle Timothy and would remain there until morning, while with the servants she was in the habit of doing as she liked. Her own horse she fed and looked after herself, and just now it was in one of the paddocks whence a whistle would bring it to her and no one see her mounting and going off.

There was not much danger either of outside spies, for Captain Wildrake's band were all far away on the hunt after the Danton bushrangers, and had been gone for the past eight days. She had heard about them and their doings, and they were now two hundred miles to the north, red-hot after this now notorious outlaw and his gang, who had been committing some dastardly outrages during that time, the rumours of which had reached her. Two hundred miles away, both bushrangers and police were, so that she had the country on this luminous night to herself and love.

Helen went to her uncle's room and bade her mother good-night, then going to her own room, she fastened on her riding skirt, and next she went to the stables, where she found her bridle and saddle hanging up; these she took down, and slipping lightly across the garden and the first paddock all amongst the heavy dew, with a soft whistle, she brought her horse to her side and saddled it.

Then away the horse flew as if in unison with the impatience of the rider; with a bound the fence was cleared easily, and over the plain they rushed, Helen's heart throbbing with exultation.

There could be no more shyness now surely since he had sent for her—no more concealment; she would now hear all and be able to plan something for him to defeat that wicked man, Wildrake.

It was a glorious night, and almost as bright as day but ten thousand times more bewitching, for the green lustre spread everywhere and clothed the dry ground with a sward-like sheen, while the air sighed softly over the lea, and the dew glistened on every side.

Had the native got back in time to warn her lover? Yes, he must, or she would have overtaken him otherwise, and the plain was deserted.

At least, it appeared empty until she had nearly crossed it, when she saw a horse and rider come out of the soft mist to meet her, and her throbbing heart told her who it was long before they met.

"Percy, my love!" she cried joyously, as the two horses stopped together, head and tail, and in her impetuosity and gladness giving the other no time for ceremony, she dropped her reins and, reaching over clasped him round the neck impulsively.

"Not Percy, Helen—James——"

"Never mind what it is, so that it is yourself at last. Kiss me, my darling, and tell me that you love me, for that is what I want to hear first of all."

It would have taken a stronger man than James Danton to refuse that invitation in the way it was

given, and thus Helen received her first love-kiss in the moonlight on horseback—a kiss mixed up with sobs, tears and hysterical laughter.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### OVER THE BRINK.

SHE could not have done it if she had not been so excited with her rapid ride and the unexpected news, as well as unstrung by the previous days of watching over uncle Timothy, but her uncle said such horrid things in his delirium that he had almost sickened her with life before this great joy had come to her like a sudden sun-ray. She had made it leap-year with a vengeance.

It was wrong—very wrong, and so Danton felt with a pang, as what he had to reveal to this confiding girl flashed across his mind almost at the moment that her dewy lips were pressed to his, but it was the first taste of heaven he ever had, and the passionate torrent of a long pent-up passion burst from him, as he clasped her to his heart, drawing her from her own saddle to his, while the two horses stood as steady as those at Whitehall while this love episode was going on.

Horses are wonderful animals for grasping and entering into situations, tender or tragic, as they are also born humourists and practical jokers. For an example of this, just see how a horse can treat the man who is timid or cannot ride—when that unfortunate wants him to gallop, he will do nothing else than trot; indeed, the moment an intelligent horse, that is, one who still has a spark of soul left in him,

feels that the man on his back cannot ride and is afraid of him, he invariably breaks into a trot when he is struck or spurred; it seems to give him much joy to see the trousers of this incompetent Yahoo rise up to his knees, particularly if he is well-dressed and wishes to shine in a public thoroughfare; it is when acting on his own responsibility, and independent of a rider whom he despises, that the horse gives way to that innate fund of humour and love of jesting that is so largely latent in his composition. He will then feign stupidity, or make an affectation of fear, shying aside at some imaginary obstacle, break into that abominable trot, stop dead at the wrong moment or set off at full speed, as if he had bolted, all for the purpose of making his awkward rider ridiculous, or to fill his quaking soul with real fear; and how these four-legged humourists do turn back their eyes and laugh when the rider at last crawls from the saddle and vainly tries to sit down on a softer seat after they have had their hour or two of downright fun out of him.

But it is when he has found his master that the horse lays down his own individuality, and becomes a receptive machine for all the human emotions which move that master; in warfare he becomes the savage and biting wild beast, with all the passions of ferocity and hatred thrilling through his quivering nerves; when the rider is daring or joyous, the horse grows fearless or bounds merrily; when the master mourns the horse droops, and so on through the whole gamut except death, for to the horse his master never dies.

At the present moment the animals who bore these united lovers felt sentimental, with the desire to stand

as closely together as they could get, and motionless so as not to disturb that tender scene; they would have liked to have been face to face also, so that they might rub noses, but they could afford to wait for that happy time until the others were more composed, so they stood patiently with their heads resting on each other's buttocks, and their humid eyes glancing shyly at the kissing pair, two wonderfully sedate and well-behaved equines.

"I ought not to have done this, Helen."

"How could you help it, and how could I, and it is so nice and satisfactory, now that it is done—isn't it, —James?" replied Helen coaxingly, as she cuddled in all the closer to his neck. "I wouldn't have missed it for more than I can tell."

"But you don't know me yet?"

"Never mind, I know you are mine, aren't you?"

"Yes, as far as my heart's love is concerned, but——"

"That's quite enough for me at present."

After this for a few moments the horses crushed closer still against each other, so that from where Worrogonga was watching in the hazy moonlight, they appeared to be a single and very singular animal altogether.

A short while longer, Helen was once again seated in her own saddle, and the horses were walking side by side with *their* heads together, discussing the matter in their own language. Then Helen said briskly:

"Now, James, we must not stay long together to-night as I have to get back soon. Tell me first how long you have been so near to me?"

"For the past two days I have been at your cave while Worrogonga, the black fellow, has been trying to deliver my message to you."

"Worrogonga! Is that the great Worrogonga whose tribe Captain Wildrake dispersed?"

"Yes—he is the only man left alive and has been my friend."

"Then I shall love Worrogonga, although he has been a great enemy to our people. Now, James, begin your confession by telling me your other name?"

"It is—*Danton!*"

"What!"

Instinctively her horse left off rubbing noses with its neighbour and started back, leaving a wide space between them, while the girl turned a white face towards her lover, whose features were in the shade.

"Yes, James Danton, the escaped convict. Now you see how wrongly I have acted."

"Never mind the convict part, it is your later movements that trouble me mostly! Do you mean to say that you are that James Danton, that cowardly bushranger who has been attacking stations lately, robbing poor shepherds, abusing women and children and murdering defenceless men? Ah! shame on these lips if they have touched those of such a dastardly monster."

"So help me God, Helen—Miss Craven—No! I never wronged nor robbed a single individual either lately or at any period of my luckless life——"

"Stop! How long have you been in this cave?"

"Two days!"

"And before that, where have you been since you left us?"

"In another cave about sixty miles from here, as Worrogonga can prove for me."

"And the police have not been after you?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Let me think it out—let me think it out—but don't come near me, and don't speak."

James Danton sat on his saddle with his face still in the shade, while Helen clasped her brow with her little hand.

A minute passed thus, then two minutes, before Helen was able to grasp the clue she was seeking; after which she looked at him steadily and asked:

"Who is Captain Wildrake, if you are a convict?"

"Gratitude forbids me to say who he is, Miss Craven, but I shall tell you my own story from the first and then you can judge *me*."

"Tell it then," answered Helen with a dry sob, as she bent her head over her saddle.

There in the moonlight, with that space between them and Worrogonga close at hand, listening also, although neither saw him, James Danton told the tragedy of his life in brief, hard words, while Helen sat listening without a word of reply or encouragement until he had finished.

He did not mean to boast about what he had been before his conviction, yet it was impossible to begin the story without explaining that time also. He was very careful to keep Wild's name out of his narrative when he came to the incident about the salt lake and the reasons for his personation of Shafton, but he had forgotten, although Helen had not, his half-confession at Turro-side on that last year's night,

and so the girl was able to grasp more than he intended her to do.

He could not see her face, and the distance was still the same between them, therefore he concluded that she was judging him harshly and that it was all over between them, for her attitude, although drooping, was not reassuring, as he began to speak about his future hopes as the excuse for his audacity in meeting her at all.

By this time they had almost reached the little gully when all at once he saw her begin to sway on her saddle and then she interrupted him:

"James—help me—I—I——"

She would have fallen if he had not plunged to her side and caught her in his arms, then she closed her brown eyes and subsided gently into her first faint, while he lifted her down and carried her to one of the water-holes, where with a wet handkerchief he revived her.

"Ah——!"

Once more she found herself on his breast, while the two horses and Worrogonga stood near at hand watching them.

"Kiss me, James, for I believe all you have told me, and know now how you are environed."

Then she allowed him to finish his story with her ear close to his lips, so that he had to speak softly, for when he would have withdrawn from her, she clasped him closely with a shiver, saying hurriedly:

"No, no! dearest love, we have both suffered enough; I must have you near me now; I must help you out of the trap, for I shall never be anyone else's. I love you."

She had, like her mother, a wonderfully astute head if rather an impulsive heart, and was very soon alert and asking him a multitude of questions.

"I know who Captain Wildrake is now, so you need not tell me any more about that blackguard, whom I must not betray for your sake. What a villain he is though, to tear up your letter to your mother, even though he had to tear up mine; you must not go back to that distant cave, but stay here instead with Worrogonga, so that I may be in constant communication with you, for they are trying to put the rope round your neck, with crimes they are committing themselves in your name, but we'll outwit your enemies yet, cunning though they are."

She promised to post his letter, which he had made another copy of, to his mother, and then told him about the reports that the police were sending down constantly, of his supposed locality and outrages.

"Luckily I have seen you to-night, for a messenger came to-day to say that you were being chased two hundred miles from here in the opposite direction, and there will be fresh accounts from these bush-rangers and murderers."

She grew very grave when he spoke about surrendering himself, and pondered upon it.

"Yes, you will be safer as a prisoner in Perth, than trusting to the mercy and friendship of Captain Wildrake, for I am sure he means to murder you, after he has blackened your character sufficiently, but in the meantime, be most careful to avoid him and his band. Worrogonga is no good as evidence in your favour, for a black fellow has no rights, but if he is your friend he will watch over you and give you

warning when anyone is coming, therefore, never trust yourself outside the cave, for there are lots of hiding places there, which Worrogonga may know about——"

"He has shown me some already."

"Good. Now you must be most careful and not be discovered before the right time comes, or you may be lost to me for ever, which would be death, my darling."

It is astonishing how brave and mature a girl becomes when she takes the management of anything into her own hands. She had made it leap-year at the start, and she meant to carry leap-year all through. James Danton felt that luck had not forsaken him when it put his hopes into those pretty hands.

Her hopes revived, and her spirits were lighter than they had been for many a day. Here was her lover, an innocent victim, and the son of an old friend and benefactor of her father, for she knew that story, and when she mentioned it, Danton also remembered seeing amongst his father's papers letters from his old friend, although the thing had not occurred to him before.

"You must stay here, Jamie, as long as you can." She didn't like the formal James, so, with a true colonial's quickness, had jumped to the more familiar and more endearing "Jamie." "You must stay here until I have clear evidence and dates of your supposed next robberies, then I'll take you to my father, and tell him all about you, without stating our future intentions, as that might prejudice me as a witness in your favour. Then I shall give you into custody,

and after you are at liberty again, you shall come back and court me properly, as a poor young girl ought to be courted." She said this demurely and sorrowfully.

"How can I be more to you than a dog, as long as this cloud hangs over my head?" asked young Danton, all the same gripping her to his heart and pouring kisses on her far too-willing lips.

"But when the time comes, Jamie, will you court me all over again? Will you forget that I have been so free with you; will you try to think me a modest bush girl who doesn't know she is dearly loved, but who might like to hear about it all the same?"

She hung her head, and began touching the Greek-braid ornament on the edge of her skirt with trembling fingers, and all the while her blush-rose lips were trembling also.

"My love! Does a man who has been wrongly doomed to the company of devils, see an angel from heaven without emotion? Does a damned soul, through the infinite mercy of God's Son, see heaven open for him, and come up the golden steps without humility? Ah, my Grace! when the hour comes that I may approach you, before men, to kiss the hem of your robe as a suppliant for your love, will I be able to do more than pray and adore you as the grace of God?"

"Yes," observed this practical maiden, after a pause of consideration. "I shall expect you to do a lot of other things. I shall expect you to kiss me like a man, and hold me to your breast—so, and tell me you love me best of all in this world—never mind the

other world at that time, and I shall expect you to be my own true and faithful sweetheart for ever afterwards, and—forget that—that—I told you I loved you before you asked *me*. Meantime I shall work for you—send your letters home to your mother, with a few lines from me saying that I am engaged to you—may I?"

"God bless you, my angel! Don't ask me for an answer to that."

"I won't, Jamie, just yet. I'll only say—my own—my darling love! Now I must ride home full speed."

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE BANK ROBBERY.

CAPTAIN WILDRAKE spent a very lively three weeks at Perth, and got introduced to a great number of people, both of the floating and fixed population. Yet on the whole he was glad to get back again to quiet Turro-side, and was not many hours behind Mr. Craven when he left the gay city, indeed, he overtook him on the road; for Mr. Craven, who liked to take matters easy, had started on his overland route the afternoon before, resting at the first house of call on the way until the others came up.

Wildrake's reason for not starting with the squatter was that he had changed his mind about his schooner, *The Maria*. He did not wish it to lie idly at Perth until his next visit, and had resolved to send it for a trial trip round to King George's Sound with its new captain and five of a crew that the said Captain Tom Bray had picked out. They were not ready to

sail on the afternoon Mr. Craven started, but had to wait for the early morning tide. So Wildrake, like a prudent owner, waited to see her off with all hands aboard, which were reasons and excuses good enough.

Captain Wildrake had gone to considerable expense in fitting up the cabin and caboose of this little craft ; the caboose, as might have been expected from one of his culinary tastes, was particularly attended to and furnished on a scale that was unprecedented.

His present crew, like the captain, were without exception ticket-of-leave men, and only two of them had any former experience of the sea beyond, of course, the trip out which all had taken, but Tom Bray picked them and answered for their capabilities, so the owner hired them from the Government without questioning his ex-convict captain's judgment.

"That's a nice lot you're taking up, Wildrake," said the official, as he gave the Captain passes for the men. "Why don't you get hold of some free men?"

"It's only a temporary crew until my own lads come down, and these are cheaper."

"Yes, but not so safe ; see that they don't bolt with your schooner."

"No danger of that, there are a dozen of young fellows, friends of mine, going as visitors to King George's Sound, and I'll arm them well and give them the bossing of it, so that these six lags won't try on any games of that sort."

After this interview with the official, he went on board, and calling his crew together, took them downstairs to the cabin, and producing the rum, had a confab with them inside closed doors.

"Now see here, boys, I hope you are the last applicants for *The Maria* this trip, for I can't afford to take any more of you, much as I like you. Are you sure no one else knows who the owner of *The Maria* is in Perth?"

"Not another blooming son of a gun," replied the men fervently.

"It is to be share and share alike with you, since you are in the know, but I've good chums up the country as well, who must be looked after, as I'm not one to neglect the interests of my friends who trust me. Now, boys, you have shown me that this city isn't as safe a place as I thought it was for a stranger to visit, and hurried me out of a good waiting game. Up country we have been industrious, I can tell you, and have a tolerable swag to take with us; now you come empty-handed, and unless you are prepared to do something good, your working pals will grumble considerably."

"Give us the lay, guv'nor, and you won't find us backward."

"Well, boys, here's my lay since things have to be hurried. I'm going to give a little farewell party to-night on board, before we break up; amongst others, the manager of the bank where most of the squatters have paid in their cash; there are a dozen of youngsters going with you on your voyage, for *a short distance* at any rate, the other guests will leave you early, and I'll see my friend the banker safe home. Now that bank is the job I want you to help me with before you sail."

"Lor', ain't that scrumptious? You've planned it carefully out boss, for it's a big job?"

"Safe as eggs. All you have got to do is to keep sober this night and follow me when I take home the manager; there are a couple or three at most of watchmen on the premises, but take your instruments and knock them on the head while I finish off my friend the manager, and then we have the run of the place, which I have studied, and three good hours to work it in. You'll have the ship moored up as close to the bank as possible to-morrow afternoon, and the motto is, 'Kill all outside witnesses,' and there can be no fear of any one telling who broke the bank."

"What about these young jokers on board?"

"They'll be dosed properly after dinner, and when you get out to sea, knock them on the head; and with a weight to each of their heels, drop them overboard; the sharks will do the rest. Only, Tom, see that they are stripped before you send them to Davy Jones's locker, so that no shred of wool gets into the sharks' teeth when they are dining, for I hate even a shark not to have his meals properly prepared for him."

It was a good dinner that Captain Wildrake gave his bachelor friends on board *The Maria*, although the drinks were more in demand than the solids, and about half-past eleven they broke up, all more or less intoxicated, for they had pledged the Captain's new venture in brimming and oft-replenished glasses.

Three of the young men could not get away, a misfortune which afterwards they did not deplore, but at half-past eleven the nine young bucks were safely carried to their bunks, and then the other guests went their different ways after wishing their host the best of luck.

At the flow of the tide *The Maria* sailed down the Swan river, while Captain Wildrake rode out of the silent town, and joined his friend Mr. Craven, after which they continued together until they reached Turro-side. Here the startling news reached them of the great bank robbery with the murder of the manager and the three watchmen, such an appalling tragedy and loss to the young colony, that it was likely to cripple it completely.

All the gold had been taken, and a considerable amount of the silver, amounting to upwards of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds; it was the most tremendous sweep that had yet taken place in the land. Fortunately, however, none of the paper had been taken.

The news spread over the colony like wildfire, squatters came hurrying over to Mr. Craven's place in despair; the robbery of a station or two was completely uncared for, so that Wildrake's band came hurrying down to be ready to help, as much excited, and as eager as the rest.

Mr. Craven was one of the heaviest losers, and although he wasn't quite beggared, for he had distributed his money in other banks, and invested a good share of it, still, he had dropped half of his hundred thousand, as the banker said he could easily, and did so with more than a wink; indeed, he forgot his character as a Sunday preacher, and made use of some very bad language at the news.

"We must all combine over this affair," said Captain Wildrake, who also swore energetically about his own losses as did the others. "It must have been a planned-out affair, but thank goodness, the money

cannot go out of the country, so that it is only a matter of time and heavy rewards to get hold of some of the gang."

This was consoling, a little, to the victims who listened to his remarks. Yes! Australia is a difficult country for men to get away from, and not many criminals of the past had been able to do so.

"Boys," said the Captain that night to his band. "It's about time we were getting our swags ready."

"By George, Captain, why did you push on affairs so quick?" cried Hickey, as representative of the band.

"Couldn't help it, lads, the position was forced on me; first one bloke gave me the straight tip that he knew me, and meant either to share or sell. I took him in much against the grain, and when I had squared that one another came on who had spotted me, until—if I hadn't cleared when I did, I'd have had to take all Rottnest with me and chartered one of Her Majesty's sloops, which I couldn't quite afford at the time."

"We can afford to do so now, *almost*, Captain, if we like," cried out Rory, with a chuckle.

"Yes, it was a stunning plant, although not so carefully thought out as I like to do these things. I meant to do it nine months after this, when we had finished up our other games. But when these new partners offered their services; with the Lord knows how many more coming behind them, I felt it to be my duty to bring it off at once and make it a swinging affair while at it for these boys, so that none of them might sneak out. They are in it now, right up to the hilt."

A hoarse chuckle ran round this blood-embrued band of desperadoes and then Hickey asked:

"Where is it?"

"Where is what—the vessel?"

"No! the cargo—the bullion?"

'Where it ought to be, inside *The Maria?*"

"What, in the charge of those priggish blokes who forced themselves into our game? Oh, golly, they'll be off with schooner and all to the Happy Islands. I'd do it myself if I was trusted so far," cried Hickey, with a heavy groan.

"Perhaps you would, Hickey, but I rather think not, under the circumstances. *The Maria* has got everything aboard for a long voyage except provisions. These we have to bring when we join them in Shark's Bay. I took care to be at the sorting of her and laid in just enough grub to carry them on light allowance to Shark's Bay, but no farther. They will not dare to land where houses are, for they know the country will be raised; besides, I left them nine passengers to dispose of who are well known in Perth, so that as they cannot produce these nine young men, they will give both passing ships and settlements a wide berth."

"I reckoned you wouldn't be too soft, even although hurried up in your game, Captain," growled Rory Murdoch approvingly.

"No, not quite. Now, Rory Murdoch, I want to split our band, and appoint you as leader of the half or coast contingent; take with you four pack-horses laden with provisions, and cut across the country to Shark's Bay. You can cover the distance in three days and arrive two or three days before *The Maria*

does, with these light winds. Act on the square as you go down so as to leave the track open for us to follow, that is, be orthodox policemen ; and as you put up at the different homesteads on the road, tell them that you are on the trail of the bank robbers."

"Which of course we will be, so that's no blooming lie."

"Of course. Take one of the trackers with you, for I want them out of my road, and one will do for me. Rub him out when you get to the coast, as he won't be required after this, and then look out for the schooner. It will be night when they approach land, after moon-set, and their signal will be a blue light. Your answer is a fire on the sands—the captain in charge knows that part of the coast thoroughly, so that there is no danger of accidents."

"Whereabouts will they come in?"

"On the south side of the Gascoyne River. When you get on board, boss the show, only keep friendly with the skipper and the two sailors. The other three, well, I don't care what you do with them, only, if you can, try to keep them good-natured and easy until I join you."

"Wouldn't it be safer for us all to go together, and at once?" asked Hickey Black a little uneasily.

"No. If I bolted now, suspicion would be pointed straight at us and we should be chased, and I want to be sure of the vessel before I make a start, and get off smoothly, if at all possible. At the present moment Turro-side Station is packed with the homeward-bound settlers, therefore, I must get rid of them before I can make the move. I'll have them organised into a special constabulary for the occasion, and packed off

on a long and false scent; then we have the place to ourselves to work at our leisure; for you must remember that Turro-side Station and some of the other farms have to supply us with the stores we require for our voyage, and that will be my affair."

"Right you are, Captain, as always."

"I want also to put this duffer Danton safely under ground, so that he may not split on us afterwards, for our home, Shafton estates, have to be considered. That reminds me, Hickey, I hope you have a good budget of crimes to charge against this young fool?"

"Yes," replied Hickey, "I've got them all written down ready for the perusal of the magistrate, and when the charge is made out, I don't think anyone can blame you for wiping out that 'ere gang. He was that daring and open with his tricks, that no one could make any mistake about who did them. Bill Jones there acted his part properly."

"Ah, you'll go along with Rory, Jones, as it won't do to show yourself at the station; and now pack up, while I pick out those I want with me. We'll bring on the loot with the ship's stores when we follow."

The Captain showed his discretion and knowledge of his men in these arrangements. Those he selected for his own party had mostly been used to the sea in their early life, while those he sent with Rory were landsmen, without any of the experience needful for the working of a vessel. He meant to take the able-bodied crew at the last along with the stores and the produce of their robberies, so that those honest fellows who were trusted in front might have the less temptation thrown in their way to skedaddle, and

leave him in the lurch. This they all saw for themselves and appreciated.

He also superintended the packing of the horses, and did not let them take away too heavy a store, and when they were ready for the road he gave Rory his final instructions:

"As soon as *The Maria* comes in, send back one of the boys with the news, so that I may hurry up and not keep you waiting. Let him ride fast, for I have no wish to stay here a day later than I can help."

"All right, Captain; so long!" answered Rory, as he and his men rode off.

"Now, boys, let us get up to the station and make your report about Danton, so that we may send these gammies on his track, out of our way."

With which orders Captain Wildrake and the remainder of his band trotted off to Turro-side.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### UNCLE TIMOTHY BECOMES THE KING OF A VERY WEALTHY REALM.

HELEN CRAVEN was naturally an open-minded girl, but the present circumstances in which she was placed were developing in her a great many of the supposed attributes of the serpent.

She now knew that her uncle Timothy had been victimized, and most likely her father also, by Wildrake, and that, by not speaking out what she knew about him she was probably injuring the entire colony, yet she resolved to go her own way to work and not hasten matters unduly.

Neither the life of her uncle, nor that of her father she considered to be in danger from this evil man. It was only the good name of the one, and some of the other's gold, which might suffer from her present silence, and even these were past curing now that uncle Timothy was beyond reason or reproach. As for the loss of a few thousands of her father's great wealth, what Irish girl, even although colonial-bred, could think of that alongside the life and liberty of her lover?

She could place her hand on the bank-robber when she wanted to do so, if he did not make his escape meanwhile, and so bitter was her enmity now towards him that she made her own plans about preventing his escape while protecting the life of her lover.

During the fortnight which elapsed between the renewed communication with her lover and the return of her father from Perth, Helen had again recovered her old elasticity of spirits, and with this new purpose in her life seemed to have leapt from careless girlhood to resolute womanhood.

She took her customary ride in the early evenings, and always in the same direction; going out eagerly and coming back gentle and happy. Ah, those were happy hours when she could leave the bedroom of her uncle and dash over the plain to meet her lover.

As for uncle Timothy, the doctor's prognostication came true before many days. He did not die, but entered instead into a state of perfect rest and happiness, so that beyond having to be looked after, as a child might, he gave very little trouble.

One day, in the midst of a furious battle with the demon serpents, something snapped in his burning

brains, and in an instant all the horrors were swept away, and he became a laughing, good-natured imbecile. His digestive faculties improved as if by magic, he put on fat, and grew younger day by day, for he had not a wish left ungratified.

He was a despotic but merry monarch, surrounded by devoted serfs, and in possession of unlimited wealth. Whatever he called for was instantly brought to him from the four quarters of the globe. He had no recollection of the cheque he had been forced to give to Wildrake, but that would not have disturbed him now, for it was one of his great pleasures to write out cheques for fabulous amounts, and scatter them broadcast to the world at large, for, as he remarked:

"Begorra! I was miserable enough for want of money in the old days, before I came to my own, and no one shall say that King Timothy the First isn't a lavish monarch. There ye are, ye blackguards, get that order cashed at the treasury, and be happy ever afterwards, as I am now, and when you want more come to your master, and he'll give ye another."

"He will not do himself any harm, will he, doctor?" asked Mrs. Craven anxiously.

"Not he," replied the doctor when he saw this comfortable change in his patient. "He is not one of the homicidal kind; as long as you supply him with note paper to fill in cheques and orders, and call the water or tea champagne, or whatever else he commands it to be, he will be no trouble to anyone. There never was a king so great or so happy as this royal brother-in-law of yours, and he will never lose his kingdom while he lives."

"Don't laugh at him, doctor; it is very piteous and will be a sad blow to my husband."

"I'm not laughing, yet why should anyone pity him? Look, all his wrinkles are going, he is getting rosy and fat, and from being a very miserable hanger-on, he has become a very pleasant, if somewhat autocratic ruler, and, as for being mad, who is not, more or less, I'd like to know?"

"But shall we not have to put him under restraint?"

"Certainly not, only don't let him patronize any bank, although even that won't matter much while he uses his own name, and he is far too great now to condescend to use anyone else's, so let him do as he likes, only keep the brandy and wine from him. Cold water will be the same to him now, and I wish we all could be as easily pleased."

Yet for all that this merry change in his brother was a worse blow to Mr. Craven than the loss of his money; however, what cannot be cured must be endured, and as Timothy was now beyond human cure, they had to make the best of him.

In many ways also it was fortunate that Timothy had become a king instead of an ordinary millionaire, as it was beneath his dignity to mingle freely with the guests. One of the station hands was told off to wait upon him as his grand vizier, until a proper dignitary arrived from Perth, and then after a stock-rider had been sent off to bring up this properly-qualified personage, Mr. Craven turned his attention to more public matters.

Helen gave some commissions to this stockman before he went off and some letters to post and

deliver for her, without her father's or any one else's knowledge. She had plenty of time to get these letters ready, all except the last one, which took only a few minutes to write out and seal. That last letter was addressed to the chief of the police at Perth, and its contents were all her own idea.

So the energetic young stockman rode away on his mission, watched by Helen with a beating heart as he left the station, at the very moment that Captain Wildrake and the half of his police force cantered in from the opposite direction to deliver his budget of news about the Danton gang to the magistrate and his anxious guests.

Captain Wildrake saw the young fellow ride off with his pack horse, without the slightest uneasiness. He lifted his hat and bowed gracefully to Miss Craven as she stood on the verandah above where he dismounted, which salutation she returned with a faint smile. He had heard about the mental condition of uncle Timothy and knew that this man had been sent off for a proper keeper, and that was all he thought about the matter.

Yes, he was very crafty, but like the good Saint Anthony, he little knew what the wily sex can do, when put on their mettle, and why should he suspect anything from that slip of a girl, considering that she had been more gracious and gentle with him since his return? Therefore naturally and man-like he thought that she had been watching for him, and that her girlish fancy for the absent Shafton had given way before his superior attractions now that he was such a universal favourite.

It would take that stockman five days to reach

Perth, but not so long for the party to return, whom that original letter of hers would send back post-haste so that she might reckon upon the answer being at Turro-side in nine days at latest—nine more days only, left to hide and scheme for the lover whom she had delivered into the hands of the authorities.

It would take Wildrake's band three days to reach the coast, when they might have to wait for three or more days for the arrival of the schooner, so that it was an uncertain game between the little traitress Helen and the murderer Wildrake, which won. She, however, had some advantage over him in that she knew him, although each was in the dark as far as their different messengers were concerned. She of course, had no knowledge about the party he had sent off, or the direction they had taken, and when she saw only half of his band with him, she suffered terribly, as she wondered where the other half were at that time; for as she knew her own intentions and judged him to be almost supernatural in his devilish craft, she could not but fear lest he might, by some occult gift have penetrated her purpose, and sent these men to cut off her messenger; therefore her guilty heart felt heavy with terror as she turned from the smiling demon and passed indoors.

Meanwhile Rory Murdoch and his men rode off briskly towards the coast, and the stockman pushed south, while Fate held the result concealed; if the winds held as light as now, that schooner might be a week late, and then, Helen would have won the entire game, but if this long calm came to an end, then one portion of the scheme would fail. Yet although

she ought to have prayed with all her might for that sultry weather to last still a fortnight longer, so oppressive was the afternoon that she actually pined for a good breeze to blow, as she tried to catch what little air there was on her fan.

Danton was safe in his cave, for she had not long returned from her ride. She had gone early this day to warn him of the return of Wildrake, and this was the cause of her heated and flushed state. Yet it was very ungrateful, although she did not know it, of her to wish for a fresh wind at such a time.

When Helen entered the room where the guests were assembled and Wildrake followed her, leaving his men outside, uncle Timothy was holding his levee before retiring to his own apartment; he was leaning in a kingly fashion on the shoulder of his temporary chamberlain and dispensing regal smiles on the company. Much improved in personal appearance he now looked the younger brother to Mr. Craven, who stood near him watching him sadly yet affectionately, while the guests tried to keep up a gravity suitable to the occasion.

"Our brother, the Prince of Turro-side, will entertain you during our absence, gentlemen, as we have state matters to attend to before bed-time. This reminds us that there are some titles at our disposal as soon as this press of business permits us to hold our proper court, and with the titles we need not inform you emoluments to suit the different ranks, for it is our desire to make all our subjects as happy as we are ourselves in our new conditions. Good afternoon, gentlemen, you will not find us forgetful of our old friends."

"Good-night to your Majesty," said the company, bending to this most affable and gracious monarch.

With a right royal wave of his hand, King Timothy retired, still leaning on the left shoulder of his deferential attendant, while the company waited for his departure respectfully; then, before the pause which followed could become awkward, Mr. Craven roused himself and addressed Wildrake.

"Well, Captain, you have brought your report and your witnesses?"

"Yes, Mr. Craven. I have here the dates and localities of the several outrages which have been committed lately by this convict Danton and his associates, and although we have not yet captured them, I shall make it my duty to ride with my men as soon as I have given you the budget, and do my best to hunt them down."

While the audience clustered round, for several of them had been sufferers during their absence, Wildrake read out his report with dates, names of stations, and the other details of each crime, while Mr. Craven wrote down rapidly what the other read.

Helen also, with her pencil, took down, from her corner where she sat at the back of Wildrake, the dates and localities, biting her lips when some extra atrocity drew exclamations of hatred and loathing from the other listeners. The Captain read his report slowly and with pauses, so as to give Mr. Craven time to write it out, therefore Helen had full opportunity to make her notes.

"His last bushranging feat was performed five days ago, and my men tracked the gang one hundred and sixty miles north-west at Belcock's Station, and

for thirty miles farther north, and then lost track; so supposing that it might be only a blind, they turned and rode back here. If I had been with them, I should not have committed this mistake, and I mean now to rectify it; but the men lost heart."

"What hour of the night was this station attacked?" asked Mr. Craven, while Helen stooped forward to listen.

"At four o'clock in the afternoon. My men came on the scene about eight."

"At that hour, five days ago, I was with Jamie in the cave," murmured Helen to herself, with a sigh of relief.

"Your men are sure it was this gang, for I hear of others being about?" again asked Mr. Craven.

"Yes; a servant girl and one of the hands, who had managed to conceal themselves amongst some bush outside, saw the scoundrels plainly, and are ready to give their evidence when wanted."

"That is conclusive enough, I think."

"Yes, quite," murmured Helen.

"Your men are accurate in their dates, I hope, Captain?"

"Very; my lieutenant is one of the most exact and methodical of men."

"Good. Well, Captain, I suppose the gentlemen present are agreed that you should lose no time in setting out on this chase?"

"Yes; the sooner the better," cried the company.

"I am going off at once," replied Wildrake; "but before I go, I should like to propose something to these gentlemen. From information that I have received, I have good reason to believe that the bank

robbers started north with their loot, and may be between this and Perth."

"Can't you take this gang first?" asked one or two of the gentlemen.

"No; I must have a shy at this Danton lot first, for they are the most numerous. The others, being laden, will be more easily tracked; and this is what I want to propose, that you, gentlemen, arm yourselves and ride towards the south, so as to intercept them, and I will join you later on. By this means we shall save time, and clear the country thoroughly, for if matters are as I suspect, I shall not have to go far north before I come on their tracks, as it is more than probable they have their own spies as well as I have about the country, and will have heard about this robbery, and want a finger in that pie also. I have already sent half of my men to the east and west of the southern region; therefore if you keep the middle trail, the business will be pretty fair sailing for us all, for I shall scour the country thoroughly on my return."

"Do the Perth authorities know about this information of yours?" asked Mr. Craven.

"Yes; I have sent off a man, and, besides, I am acting under instructions from headquarters. There are my written orders."

Captain Wildrake showed a letter, which Mr. Craven recognised, or thought he did, as the handwriting of the chief of police, and he at once said:

"That is right, gentlemen, and should be acted on with promptitude. Well, gentlemen, I don't want to send my visitors away, but I think, if we wish to

recover our lost property, that you should do as Captain Wildrake suggests."

"Of course we will, to-morrow morning," cried the gentlemen, without hesitation. "We have all good mounts and weapons, so we shall be for the present volunteers of the Gascoyne police."

"To-morrow morning will do for you to start," said Wildrake. "Meanwhile, Mr. Craven, if you can give my men some supper, we'll start away to-night, and if you will camp, gentlemen, a hundred miles from here until I join you, that will be far enough, and then my men from the east and west will send in their reports. The gang must strike up for certain, and the police from Perth will form a ring so that they cannot possibly escape."

"I hope we'll recover this money."

"There isn't a doubt about it," replied Wildrake, as he went out to speak to his men.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE LOVERS ARE TRAPPED.

AFTER supper Wildrake and his men rode away, leaving the others busily preparing for the next day's expedition, which was to start immediately after the little breakfast at daybreak. This little breakfast generally consists in a cup of tea or coffee and some biscuit, and continues as each man gets up and has his bath, from early dawn till eight o'clock, after which the big breakfast comes on. The station hands, who have to go out at daybreak, generally have their main feed then, but to the visitors it is

merely the waking-up refreshment, the same as is served on board ship.

Helen forced herself to be pleasant to this murderer and traitor Wildrake, during the repast before he left the station, for she wished, of all things, to hide from him her knowledge of his character, and send him off without any suspicions, and in this hypocrisy she succeeded so well, that he took his departure fully convinced that she thought more of him than any other man in the room, as indeed she did, although not in the way his vanity suggested.

Her mind was much occupied in thinking why he was sending all these men out of the way, for she, of course, did not for a moment credit the reason he gave, or believe any more in that supposed letter of instruction and information, than she believed in his false report about her lover. Only one conclusion could she come to, and that was, he and his men were going to leave the district and wanted a few days' start, and this comforted her, even although she hated to think of him escaping with all that booty, yet it was better so for her lover's safety.

She longed also to warn her father and the others, that they were being sent on a wild-goose chase. But this she dared not risk, for she was positive that Wildrake had only made a pretence of going on that night before, and that he would lie in ambush somewhere, and watch the departure of the others. Therefore she prudently held her secret and let them depart, even although by doing this, they left the station almost unprotected.

No harm could come to her father from this long ride, indeed perhaps, only safety, and as for the station,

beyond some stores, there was nothing else worth stealing. Nothing to tempt such desperadoes as these were, so heavily laden already with gold.

She had heard about Wildrake's purchase of the schooner, and instinctively guessed what that was bought for. No, she could not warn her father without bringing on a conflict which might have fatal results. Better, far better, permit the real criminal to make his escape, than risk a battle before the *bonâ-fide* police came up.

She did not think of herself as being *anything* left exposed, which might tempt a bushranger to take away, and she thought because she had probed some of the Captain's bloodthirsty proclivities, treachery and gastronomic weaknesses, that she had fathomed his entire character, The man who made cooking such an absolute religion, would naturally be the incarnation of selfishness and treachery; for he who cannot forego his dinner is a born traitor, who would sacrifice his friends and country to his appetite without a pang of remorse, and the traitor, if brutal enough, would also be a tiger in the matter of bloodshed—but the man who had such tastes would be far too self-concentrated to be dangerous as an admirer, or sacrifice his own safety by hampering his movements with women.

This is how she reasoned to herself about Wildrake, who had never paid her any particular attention, and the more she pondered upon it, the surer she became that he was now preparing to decamp quietly.

And she was correct in some of her thoughts about this man, if over-confident in others. He and his men did lie in ambush and watch the station party

ride south the next day, for he trusted nothing to chance. He was daring enough to have stuck up the station with the whole crowd inside, if they had not taken his advice and thus saved him that trouble. He also meant to decamp quietly, if possible. But where she erred was in thinking that he would forego one of his purposes, even for his own personal safety.

He was an epicure and monomaniac on cooking and not a gourmand at all, and thought little about fasting when there was a necessity for doing so, and no hero or patriot could endure privation more cheerfully than he could, when he had a reason for enduring. He was a tiger, not alone in his love of slaughter, but in his tenacity and singleness as well as patience in purpose. But tigers, like other cats, have their tender moments also, and he was a sybarite who, when he had fixed his mind upon the gaining of a pleasure, counted no price too high, no obstacle too great to get it, and he had fixed his patient mind upon the getting of her, not only as the heiress of her father, but for her own charms. He wished also to secure Danton for another purpose.

His first intention had been to kill Danton, and deliver him up in his own person as the escaped convict, but now he had a better plan in regard to that young man, so that his life was for the present as sacred as hers was. He would secure him and bring him down to the station gagged and bound—show him to Mrs. Craven as his prisoner, and then carry him with Helen on board the schooner, promising to Mrs. Craven that he would set both prisoners at liberty after he was himself free from pursuit. He would be frank with Mr. Craven, and reveal who he

was himself when he paid his next and final visit to the station.

Afterwards, when at sea, he would kill Danton quietly and pretend he had fallen overboard, and then force Helen to marry him as Shafton. She would be glad enough to do this, before he was done with her, and when she knew for certain that the man she thought to be Shafton was really dead, for girls of his former acquaintance would not mourn for very long over a deceased lover, any more than widows are apt to do over a dead husband; and with such a splendid lady-killer as he was, there would not be much trouble about gaining her consent before they reached their destination, he would take good care of that.

In this way Wild, the Australian bushranger, would die as he had done before, and be re-incarnated as the Hon. Percy Shafton, and the son-in-law of the wealthy Mr. Craven. He could draw that income from England, and live in clover ever afterwards in some of the South American paradises, until time had made people forget, or death had removed them from his path. It seemed to be all plain enough sailing to this fertile-brained and remorseless sybarite.

The men he had with him he could trust as far as such men could be trusted; their future interests, as well as present safety, were bound up with his, and he had made himself their master as much through friendship as well as by his superior generalship, therefore, as soon as he had seen the squatter volunteers safely off the field, he turned to the other bushrangers and gave his instructions.

"Now, boys, our time must be short in this locality,

so while I am away after this Danton, you, Sam Belger, and Owen, go over to the barracks and pack up the loot that is there, with what provisions we have in the store, and when you are ready set off leisurely after the others to the coast; we won't be long behind you, and as we shall make tracks, you'll see us in four days' time from now; better fix upon some quiet place about sixty or seventy miles from here, and lie low until we join you. I'll get enough stores from Turro-side to serve our voyage, with what you will take. Make your preparations quietly, and start at night, and take all the horses, so that we may have a change for our packs when we come up to you."

He had already explained his reasons for taking Danton and Helen along with them, and as their rule was share and share equally, they quite approved of the encumbrance of two such valuable captives.

"I am going to leave a good name at Turro-side before I leave it, and treat them all round in a Claude Duval fashion; that is I'll tie them up safely, but apologize for the stern necessity, so that they won't be under the same fears for our interesting captives. It is always best to leave good impressions when it's our interest to do so!"

* * * * * *

For two days, which were very long ones to her, Helen Craven kept to the house, for she was frightened lest Captain Wildrake might still be hanging about the vicinity and see her, and she had arranged with her lover that, if she didn't come, he would know there was danger and keep within the cave, while, having plenty of provisions, there was no fear of him wanting anything except her company.

On the third day, however, she became too impatient to keep back any longer, and getting her horse saddled, she rode away in the afternoon to see how he and Worrogonga were getting on, and to make her confession to him of what she had done.

In a few more days, the Perth police would be up, and then he would have to go back to his bondage and endure it as best he could until the proofs of his innocence arrived from England. The separation would be the hardest trial, yet she had good reasons to hope that her father would use his influence to make the imprisonment an easy one, and as her lover had already assured her, whether in a cave or in a cell, confinement was nothing to suffer in itself, if there was hope at the end that he might regain his lost position.

She was resolved to keep him in that cave until she had explained everything to her father and the police, and then, when they were convinced that Wildrake was the real criminal and bank robber, she would appoint a time and let her lover yield himself up.

Her motive for acting in this way she would keep to herself, so as to prejudice no one; her assumed reason would be that he had confessed himself to be the son of her father's old friend.

Of course, if Wildrake and his gang could be captured with the proceeds of the different robberies upon them, it would simplify matters greatly, but if not, her own statements must go far to clear his name from these late outrages.

The long dry season was not yet nearly over, yet she was glad to find that a light breeze was blowing from the south. It blew her light veil aside and fanned

her hot cheek, and she felt grateful for it; yet if she had seen Wildrake at that moment sitting on his mare and holding up his wet finger to test the strength of that same breeze, and also uttering his gratitude for its coming, she might have preferred the former sultry calm.

The schooner was at last making furrows in the amethystine waves, while as Helen drew close to the gully from the one side, Wildrake with his men and the tracker in front, were coming round the other way to the same destination.

James Danton saw her from his point of observation as she entered the gully, and leaving Worrogonga, who was at that moment busy sorting some spears, he sprang forward to meet her, no longer the hopeless and desponding young laggard, whose spirits she had so vainly tried to raise, but strong and confident, devoted yet respectful, for he could not just yet muster courage enough to take her to his arms quite so boldly as he would learn to do by-and-bye.

But Helen understood all those hesitancies, and clasped him fervently round the neck instead, making him kiss her as she kissed him.

"There has been some danger, since you did not come, Helen?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, Jamie! Wildrake has been at the station, but I think he has gone for good, therefore I am here."

"He has escaped?"

"That depends upon if he can get away; but I think he is on the way to the coast with his gang."

"Do not speak of this before Worrogonga, for I believe he will go mad, if his enemy escapes him; he

is hard at work preparing his weapons for Wildrake's benefit."

By this time they were inside the cave, where the native chief was busy muttering to himself, as he sat sharpening some spears. He looked up at Helen as she entered, and nodded softly, but without desisting from his task.

"Look out, you mandegâra white fellow, there am Kabarda fellow here."

She understood the warning, and looking over to where he sat, saw three deaf-adders wriggling on the ground to which they were securely pinned by forked stakes of wood enclosing their necks. Worrogonga had been out hunting for snakes that morning, and these were the specimens he had secured.

"What are you doing there, Worrogonga?"

"Me make ready for that dam fellow Wild, he come bymby, you see bymby."

"But what have these Kabarda fellows to do with it?" again asked Helen.

"Wild got horse he loves very much! kill that horse, hurt Wild more than if I kill him; Kabarda fellows make that horse so, Wild no ride him no more, then I get Wild in these hands—ah! he no beat Worrogonga this time, you bet."

"What does he mean to do?" asked Helen to her lover.

"He has an idea that Wildrake's mare is a demon, by whose aid Wildrake derives his success and strength, and this is some kind of incantation, I suppose, to get the horse into his power."

"Let us go outside, Jamie, for I want to tell you something, and leave Worrogonga to his incan-

tations," Helen whispered, as she led him outside, leaving the chief to his pointed spears and his writhing but venomous reptiles.

Together they sat down by the water-pool, and resting on his breast, she told him, he must prepare to give himself up in a few more days. Considering that Wildrake had now gone off, she did not mention the service she had tried to render that scoundrel; indeed for the time she forgot all about him.

They were both so much engaged with each other, that they did not look about them; otherwise, they might have heard the dry branches break under the soft tread of Wildrake and his men who were swiftly surrounding them. Foolish couple! they had chosen an exposed place, and the bushrangers had plenty of time to dismount and get to them.

"I am ready to give myself up when you like, Helen," said Danton simply.

"But I am not so ready to give you up, now that the time draws near, Jamie, and I have a plan for a little longer delay."

"What is it, dearest?"

"Now that this man Wildrake has gone, for of course he must have taken this chance."

"Yes, I think so also."

"What is to prevent you returning to the station in your old character as Percy Shafton? I have kept your secret well, so that no one knows that James Danton and Percy Shafton are the same person, and if you come back before father returns, my mother will make it all right, for she liked you so much, then we can spend a few more weeks at any rate together before we are parted."

"No, Helen, I detest the name, and I want to be done with all this duplicity."

"I fear, though, you must sham a little longer, James Danton, alias the Hon. Percy Shafton!" shouted Captain Wildrake, as he and his men leapt upon the startled pair and tore them apart.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE ROBBERY OF TURRO-SIDE STATION.

THERE were nine men, including Wildrake, so that the struggle was a short one, and from the noise made, must have have been heard by Worrogonga, although he did not appear on the scene—a piece of discretion which Danton was glad of, as he felt that at liberty, the chief might be still of service to them, whereas, if he had shown himself, he would have been shot instantly.

Very soon they were bound firmly hand and foot, and then Wildrake again spoke:

"You may not have been aware of the fact, Miss Craven, but those last words of yours have saved your mother's life. I can see now that I have been known to you as well as to our mutual friend here, yet you need not be afraid of me for all that."

"I am not afraid of you, *Bushranger!*" replied Helen, with scornful emphasis.

Wildrake shrugged his shoulders.

"And yet you might have some cause, if you have heard of my former exploits; but I have no wish to harm either of you, only I must provide for my own safety with that of my men, therefore I shall have to treat you as prisoners for a short time since you

know so much, and prevent you from betraying what you have been so good as to keep a secret up to now —gag them both securely, boys, but do it very gently and don't hurt them."

The bushrangers were expert binders and gaggers, and soon had the lovers laid speechless and helpless on the ground, after which Captain Wildrake sat down beside them and lit a cigar.

"Get the horses along, while I have a smoke; you will find Danton's horse in the cave there, I expect."

Danton felt a little reassured when one of the men brought out his horse, and led it with that of Helen's up to them, for this man came along quite unconsciously, so that he could not have seen Worrogonga. The tracker also was lying a little distance off, considering doubtless that his work was for the present over; black trackers, like all other aboriginals, do not like work, and never volunteer to do any if they can help it, so that although he perhaps might have told his present master, there was another trail, not being asked to do so, he kept that information to himself.

Meanwhile, Wildrake smoked his cigar silently and thoughtfully without looking at his captives. Then all at once he pulled a small book from his pocket, and wrote rapidly with his pencil, finishing his task with a satisfied smile by the time the other horses came up, and as he restored the book to his pocket, he said:

"This will be a valuable book some day, whoever gets it from me, for it is more than half filled with theoretical recipes, each one a gem of its kind. There, I shall give it to you, Miss Craven, as a wedding

present when I have filled it up; it will make you a prize to your husband, and when you reap the benefit I fancy you'll be able to forgive me for my present cruelty in stopping up your pretty mouth, for I'm not a bad sort of devil after all, and I always keep my promises—when I can."

He rose to his feet as he spoke, and lifting the girl up, he placed her carefully on her horse, allowing the others to do the same to Danton.

"It is almost sundown now, boys, so if we walk the horses back, we shall just be in time to catch the station hands at their supper, and as I know the place thoroughly, we shall be able to get through our business early and have a clear night before us."

The sun was setting as they left the gully, and before they were half-way across the plain, green night had fallen upon them, and by the time the station was sighted with its numerous lights, darkness lay over the land.

"We have no further use for masks, boys, for this will be the easiest job we have yet had. One of you hold these two horses at the gate until I send for the prisoners for Mrs. Craven to see that they are alive and well. The rest of us will take the boothies first —so!"

They entered the front gate quite in their usual way, and jumping from their horses, fastened them to the trees inside, then, leaving one man on guard, they went over to the boothy, where the station hands were at that moment all assembled, preparing their supper.

"Good evening, lads," said Wildrake, looking in upon them.

"Got back?" said one of the men, looking up from his frying-pan.

"Yes," replied Wildrake, calmly. "Now, I'll trouble you all to put up your hands, for you are covered by my men, and the first one that refuses will have his brains blown out, if he has got any to spare!"

As he had anticipated, it was a remarkably easy job, for before the men could comprehend whether it was a grim jest or not, they were lying helplessly bound in their different bunks. Then Wildrake went up to the fireplace and carefully removed the frying-pan, saying quite pleasantly:

"Sorry, lads, to spoil the cooking of your steaks, but you really ought to grill them on such a nice wood fire as this is. Now keep perfectly still, and no one will be hurt, while as soon as I possibly can, I'll set you at liberty again. There, those couple of logs will just be in good condition for grilling by the time we are done, and I advise you not to forget my culinary hint."

He put a couple of large logs on the embers, and after carefully arranging them so that they would take light quickly, and burn slowly, he turned to the door.

"Now, lads, for the quality. One of you will be sufficient to look after the fire for these men, and a couple will do for me. The rest go to the stables and bring out all the horses, so that we may lose no time."

Mrs. Craven was sitting in the dining-room with a lamp beside her, as she knitted a stocking, while she waited for the return of her daughter. King Timothy

was with his chamberlain in the bedroom, as Wildrake took his way round to the kitchen where the cook was busy preparing dinner. The maids were resting on their oars and chaffing the two old Irish servitors who had come out with Mr. Craven and who stuck to him so faithfully, when the door opened and the three pseudo policemen entered.

There was no sort of alarm at the sight of these intruders in the kitchen, any more than there had been in the boothy. The only alteration was in the demeanour of the maids, who from boisterous jesting, became demure and lamb-like, indeed, it was not until Wildrake had locked both doors that the silence was broken by the cook, who exclaimed irately :

"An' fat the devil may yez be doing wid me kitchen locks, may I be bould enough to enquire, Captain Wildrake ?"

"Hush !" replied Wildrake mysteriously, as he held up his finger warningly.

"Hush !" echoed the two bushrangers, as they got ready their bracing ropes.

"Holy mother ! but yez don't mean to say that the bushrangers are about, do yez ?" asked the cook, anxiously, while the maids flopped down upon chairs, and prepared either to faint or yell, according to the first one who set them the example. The white-haired servitors looked on, however, stolidly, and smoked their pipes.

"Not a word, not a moan, not a whisper, or you are corpses to a certainty," again said Captain Wildrake, softly, but more impressively than before, and immediately the cook led off the other females by most discreetly fainting on the hearthrug.

"Ah, that is the safest thing to do," said Wildrake, looking round on the swooning maids. "Now, look after the safety of these faithful old buffers."

In a twinkling the men-servants were sitting back to back on two chairs, and quite securely fastened, while any bad language which they might have been inclined to indulge in was promptly suppressed with a couple of the many dish-towels hanging round the walls.

The cook they bundled into her dripping closet, where she came to her senses in a state of darkness. The maids they strapped together and rammed without ceremony into the scullery, and then, having cleared the kitchen, they proceeded to the state chamber of King Timothy, the door of which they knocked at, and waited, for with the exception of Mrs. Craven, Timothy and his man, they had now entire and peaceful possession of Turro-side Station.

When Timothy's man came to the door Wildrake beckoned him outside, which he had no sooner done, than the two followers fell upon him, bound and gagged him as they had done the others, and while they were doing this Wildrake entered the chamber and approached his victim with a deep and courtly bow.

King Timothy had been getting ready for his couch, as, since he had become a royal personage, he required a great deal of sleep; in fact, out of the twenty-four hours he usually slept away twenty, waking, however, for his meals, of which he partook very heartily. He was now sitting on a chair, costumed only in his nightshirt, and with his feet in a shallow bath, while on his head he wore a light paste-board crown,

which his man had made for him, and covered with gilt paper and coloured bon-bon stuff to represent precious stones. It was a pretty crown and looked as good as the real thing, and much lighter and more comfortable to the wearer.

He looked up sleepily, yet with a pleasant smile, at Wildrake, towards whom he seemed to have no disagreeable recollections.

"Your Majesty, I have ventured to intrude at this unseemly hour on most important state business."

"You have our gracious leave to state your business!" answered this affable monarch, rousing himself with an effort.

"Some of your Majesty's subjects have become discontented, and have rebelled."

"Discontented, bah! it must be money they require, for that's the only thing to make men discontented."

"Exactly, your Majesty," replied Wildrake calmly.

"Bring forward that writing-table, and I will write them orders on the treasury for a million each; will that content them, do you think?"

"It ought to, your Majesty."

"How many orders will you require to-night?"

"Fifty will do for to-night."

"Enough, it is a small amount for a king to pay for a night's repose, although, begad, I mind the time when I would have grumbled at it. Fifty million pounds sterling—a mere flea-bite to the like of me, and now, minister, what's-your-name, while I am writing out these orders, announce to my faithful subjects that each man, woman or child who has not had a cheque from me already, may draw upon me

to the amount of one million sterling. Good-night—you are dismissed."

Timothy waved his hand towards the door, and Wildrake, with another low bend, backed out, taking the key as he went, and locking the busy ruler inside.

"You need not come with me to the dining-room, boys, go meantime and bring up the two prisoners from the gate, and the rest of the boys. I shall get the keys of the store-house from Mrs. Craven, and hand them to you in a few minutes."

Mrs. Craven was still sitting beside the lamp when he entered the room, she merely looked up from her work as he approached, hat in hand, and said:

"You have returned early, Captain Wildrake."

"Yes, Mrs. Craven, but I am not Captain Wildrake—don't start—I am Derrick Wild, the bushranger, and my men have possession of Turro-side Station."

She did not start at this abrupt announcement, for she was a brave woman, she only regarded him with a calm look, and as she read that cruel, handsome face, she knew that any attempt at resistance or appeal was useless.

"What do you want of me, sir?"

"Your help to open your husband's safe and store-house, that is, I want the keys from you."

She folded the stocking carefully, and laid it with the work and wires on the table, and then rose up:

"I am ready to give you what you want. Have you killed any of my people?—good heavens! my daughter Helen—is she safe?"

"No one is hurt on the station; for they have all

displayed the same discretion that you have done. You will see your daughter in a moment, with a friend of yours whom I brought along with me."

"Who is that?"

"The Honourable Percy Shafton, they are both safe, as you will see presently; come, for I have no time to waste."

He took the lamp in his hand and led the way to the door, and on the verandah, outside of which his gang were assembled with the two captives and the stolen horses; holding up the lamp with one hand, he dragged the lady of the house forward by the arm until she could see her daughter and Danton plainly.

"You know these two, madam, and can see for yourself that they are alive and well, although bound."

"Yes," murmured Mrs. Craven faintly.

"Enough! then testify that fact to your husband—and tell him that I shall take them as hostages for my own safety until I get out of this accursed country. If I do not, they will be my first victims before I am caught myself; if I do get free, I shall set them both at liberty. Meanwhile be under no apprehension for their personal safety, for I shall watch over them and treat them well. Now, give me the key of the store-room, office and safe."

He followed her into her husband's room, where she gave him the different keys, and after this he made her go back with him to the verandah.

"There, boys, hurry up with the stores, take all that you can load the horses with easily, for we must push on to-night, but I don't want any over-loading to hinder our speed. Is there anyone on the watch?"

"Yes, Captain, both at back and front."

"Now, madam, come with me to your husband's office."

The bushrangers who were with him being mostly old sailors, worked with both energy and dexterity while he was rummaging the safe, so that in half-an-hour's time they were ready for the road.

"Now, Mrs. Craven, you have been kind to me in the past, and I have no wish to tie you up if you will pass me your word that you do not move from your room for one hour from now; it is five minutes to eight o'clock now, at ten minutes to nine you can do what you please."

"I promise," said the poor lady with drooping lids, "only take care of my daughter and restore her to me."

"I shall be kind to her, never fear, and you will see her and Shafton soon I have no doubt; meantime, when your hour is up, at the door of your brother-in-law's rooms you will find his man tied up, but otherwise uninjured. Timothy I have locked in, and set to write out cheques, so that he is all right; in the kitchen the servants are tied up, and in the boothy are the station hands. Good-bye, Mrs. Craven, I depend on your promise as you may on mine, and I hope that this is the last time you may look upon the unwelcome visage of Derrick Wild."

With his loot in his arms he strode out of the office, leaving Mrs. Craven sitting in her husband's arm-chair, and looking at the timepiece on the mantel.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### DERRICK WILD MAKES A MASTERPIECE.

It was growing rapidly dusk on the evening of the day after the sticking up of Turro-side a hundred miles to the westward, and the bushrangers, who had been travelling at the utmost speed that their horses could go, and without a rest, resolved to call a halt for the night for the sake of their exhausted cattle.

Through a flat and bush-covered country, they had pushed on at a merciless rate, not that they were afraid of being pursued so soon, but rather that they longed with a feverish impatience to get to the coast; for now that freedom was so near, no man could rest a moment still. They felt like caged tigers with those jarrah forests hemming them in. They wanted to smell the brine, to see the blue waves roll in from the purple horizon to the yellow sands. Lord! how they would dabble amongst it when they got there, how they would lie down and kiss the boards of that blessed *Maria* as she turned her face from this accursed prison land and bore them to freedom and unbridled pleasure.

Derrick Wild had come upon Sam Belger and his party about noon, and, without waiting longer than to enquire if the messenger from the coast had arrived yet, and hearing that he had not, hurried on the exhausted horses and men with all the impetuosity of a Bonaparte, over the burning, bush-covered plains, with the fine dust sticking to their wet skins, hair and

hides, until they appeared to be a rushing procession of grey stone statues; indeed so thickly were they covered with this uniform tint of the surrounding country that but for their movement and the pearly shadows they cast, they would not have been seen from a distance at all.

He had removed the gags and ropes from Helen and Danton as soon as they got clear of Turro-side, and now allowed them to ride as free as were the others, only taking the precaution of keeping them in the centre of the armed band so that escape was utterly impossible, and with that fine dust floating about and making their throats as dry as baked clay conversation was almost impossible.

Yet he permitted them to ride together and that was one comfort, and he did not intrude his company upon them, and that was another; indeed, he was as kind as a captor could be to them, filling their flasks with water and giving them bread to eat, the only liquids and solids one could take while in that intense heat and while going at that unremitting speed. No man spoke in that gang—no man even could spare breath enough even to blaspheme, but with tightly-closed lips and sand-filled eyes, they kept sternly—obstinately on.

A city maiden would have fainted many times, or died outright during that long ride, but Helen was country bred, and suffered perhaps even less than the men or horses, for where girls are inured to roughing it, they can endure longer, or at least give out fewer signs of fatigue than either men or horses. Her lover was beside her, unhurt so far, and the bushrangers were as orderly as good stockmen,

and hope was high in her breast that as soon as they reached the coast they would be set at liberty, for Derrick Wild had informed them both that he did not want to be troubled with them any further, so perhaps this was the secret of her bravery amid such a desperate band.

About sunset they sighted a small sheep station, and while three of the bushrangers remained on guard, Derrick Wild and the others rode forward. She shivered with horror as she heard the reports of pistol-shots after the desperadoes had entered the homestead, but the listeners had not long to wait before they received the signal to ride forward, and when they came to the farm, only the bushrangers met them and ushered them into the dining-room, where all was peaceful and quiet. She dared not ask what had been done to the owners of this comfortable house, and Derrick's dark face showed no signs as he helped her to dismount, and took her with Danton inside ; and, as she sank on the couch, thoroughly done up, Wild said :

"We once had a discussion at Turro-side about my cooking, Miss Craven, and I promised you a dinner that you would enjoy some time, let me fulfil that promise to-night."

"I would rather go to bed if you don't mind," murmured poor Helen languidly, with a shiver of fatigue and disgust.

The bushranger's dust-clogged brow became corrugated, and his blood-shot eyes blazed luridly yet he answered quietly :

"I've been planning out this dinner all day as we rode along through that choking dust, and it will

disappoint me very, very much if you refuse me this favour. Surely you will not disappoint me like this?"

Helen shivered again, this time with unmitigated horror, as she met those fierce eyes, as she said:

"I am not hungry; yet, if it will please you, I shall dine with you to-night."

"Good!" The Captain smiled pleasantly, while his brow cleared. "I intend to make you hungry for my dinner. Meantime, take a glass of wine, and then, while I am cooking, have a wash and a rest for two hours. I am going to have a wash myself, and you had best do the same, Danton; but, first, a jorum of 'three star' before we begin."

He had them in his power, yet he was respectful and genial, while his iron constitution seemed to feel none of the fatigue that left them so helpless. With a firm hand, he took the decanter from the sideboard and poured out first a glass of sherry for Helen, and then two glasses of brandy and water for himself and Danton.

"We have had a stiff ride to-day, but it has brought us all nearer to liberty, and I trust you will forgive me for the fatigue I have caused you both. Here is to your happy release and happier union—for I see that all has been arranged between you two."

He clanked glasses with Danton and Helen, and then quaffed off his at a single draught.

"Danton, you may not believe it, but I brought you this length for a more disinterested purpose than the security of my own safety, and as I want you both to have a good appetite for the dinner I am going to prepare, I'll tell you my secret now, as I

think it will prove a first-rate tonic. I found a bundle of more important letters amongst the effects of the Honourable Percy Shafton than the one I showed you. Here they are."

He pulled from his breast-pocket a bundle of letters, which he handed to Helen, who took them eagerly.

"The whole history of Shafton's forgery is clearly set out in these letters, which are all from the same money-lender, with receipts for the money paid back, and with what even *I* call heavy interest; therefore, when you say good-bye to me, you can clear your name entirely with the authorities, without waiting for the answer to the letter that I *posted for you.*"

"But, Captain Wildrake," said Helen gravely, "all this would be a tonic, and I should enjoy your dinner vastly but for one thing, which is still likely to take away my appetite. What about those after crimes which James, I mean Mr. Danton, is said to have committed since, and which *we* know were the work of your men?"

"What, are you insatiable, Miss Craven?"

"Yes; a woman always is until she is entirely satisfied, and I would like to be quite easy in my mind, so as to enjoy your cooking properly, for I am just beginning to get hungry now, and I want to think tenderly about you afterwards when you are away."

"So let it be, for that dinner will be a *chef d'œuvre*, and nothing must interfere with *it*. Here, I'll write out a full confession, and my men shall sign it after me. Will that give you a good appetite?"

"A most ravenous appetite," replied Helen rap-

turously, smiling upon him in a manner to make any less interested and trusting lover jealous than the one she had.

"Then here goes," replied the bushranger gastronome, going over to the desk, after filling up another glass of brandy and water for himself, and opening it, he drew out a sheet of note paper. "This dinner must be considered before all else; besides the rope is already round our necks, and we cannot be hanged twice."

He wrote his confession rapidly, while Helen leaned over him, after motioning her lover to remain back, her woman's instinct showing her that she could manage this business best by herself, and as he wrote, she read:

"I, Derrick Wild, escaped convict and bushranger, hereby confess that the crimes which I, under my character of police inspector of Turro-side, attributed to James Danton, were committed by me and my band, and that he was in no wise cognisant of any of them.

"(Signed), DERRICK WILD."

"Here, boys, come in one by one, and sign this paper," shouted Wild loudly, when he had finished writing, and obedient to his call, they came in and made their marks or signed their names, no man even troubling to read the confession which they signed. It was another deep game of their leader's to put more money in the coffers, they each and all considered.

When the last man had signed, the Captain blotted

and folded up the paper, and then handed it to Helen with a light laugh.

"Will that satisfy you in the way of a tonic, Miss Craven?"

"Oh, yes, Captain Wildrake, you are not such a wicked man after all; in fact—you may kiss me, if you care to do so."

The bushranger glanced over his shoulder to where Danton was standing; then, after looking at her for a moment in such a way that she could hardly keep down her horror and disgust, he took a drink at the glass of brandy, and jumping up said a little huskily:

"Not now, Miss Craven; it might spoil your appetite—and mine. I may ask you for this kiss by-and-bye, but for the present, I thank you in anticipation."

Turning from her, he passed rapidly over to Danton, and gripping him firmly by the arm, he said:

"Come, old fellow, let us have that wash-up together; we can show Miss Craven another bedroom in this shanty, and afterwards, while I am cooking the dinner, you can both return and examine these letters at your leisure. They will serve to pass the time until I am ready for you."

They went together into the lobby like good friends, for Danton and Helen felt grateful to this strangely-mixed character, so crime-embrued, yet who could do such a generous action at such a time. When Helen got inside, woman-like, she first locked the bed-room door, and then read the bundle of letters, after which she smiled in a satisfied manner, and proceeded to remove the dust from herself and

make herself charming. This done, she placed the letters and confession very carefully within that receptacle which ladies believe in more than banks, and, with a final look into the cheval glass, sought the dining-room, not a bit fatigued with her long ride, and *really* hungry.

"Let me have the basin first," said Wild, as he entered the other bed-room with Danton, "as I have to do some work while you enjoy yourself," saying which he poured out the water and commenced operations.

"You are a good chap, Wild; and I hope you will get off," remarked Danton, as the other mopped himself with the large towel.

"Do you really?" asked Wild, looking at him curiously as he removed the towel from his eyes. "And so do I, with all my heart; on that you may stake your life—and love."

Helen did not let her lover read those precious letters. When they met in the dining-room she said to him instead:

"I have read them, Jamie darling; and they are all that you require. Let us talk about something else. This strangely-generous bushranger, do you know, I think I was wrong in my first dislike of him? —women's instincts are not always correct after all; let us both feel grateful to him."

"And you would really have kissed him on the mouth, Helen?"

"Well, candidly, Jamie, I shrank from the sacrifice; but yet—yet, I think I would under the circumstances, for he deserved something, didn't he?"

"Ah, Helen!"

"Ah, Jamie!"

A pause, during which two more willing lips met in a lingering salute.

"That was nicer, I must admit," said Helen, as she arranged her rumpled hair. "Do you know, dear, I'm not the least bit tired, and I do hope he will be quick with dinner, for I'm awfully hungry for it."

In the kitchen Wild was even more intent than usual over the dishes, when his attendant, Sam Belger, said to him:

"I read some of that 'ere paper afore I signed it, captain. Don't you think it a bit venturesome?"

"No, Sam. She'll be grateful to me for it, and that will pave the way to love."

"But supposing we don't get off, what then?"

"Give the poor devils a chance for happiness. Now shut up, and don't interrupt me at my work, for I can think of nothing beyond."

Within two hours the dinner was served, and pronounced a masterpiece. Helen had never tasted anything like it in her life, and dish after dish came out; all sense of fatigue fled, and for the first time in her young life she entered into the gastronomic paradise. Her brown eyes swam with languor and content, and selfish pleasure died within her. She became tolerant to all the faults of those around her—it was the acme of a perfect digestion skilfully manipulated by a master of the art.

She was young, therefore love had to enter into this passionless heaven; she turned her heavy eyes towards her lover, and wished no further.

But it was a Sardanapalus's feast for all that, for even at the supreme height of their placid content

the sound of doom came as it had come before to the native camp, for retribution is generally very exact in its penalties.

"Crack! crack! crack!" from different sides of the house, burst in rapid and resounding reports, while one of the wounded bushrangers rushed in.

"We are surrounded, captain," he shouted. "Get out while you can—each man for himself."

"Damnation!" cried Wild, getting up from his seat. "Why couldn't they have waited another hour for this supper to have digested? The beasts! No matter, it's now each man for himself, and the devil take the hind one!"

He leaped over the table as he spoke, and gave a shrill whistle, next moment he was out on the verandah, where his blood mare had come, and had sprung on her back, then away into the darkness with a bound.

Helen saw him go, and in her heart wished him success, even while she dragged her lover out of the dining-room and along the lobby into that bed-room where she had read the letters, and when she got there she said, after locking the door and barricading the windows:

"Kneel with me, Jamie—pray with me, Jamie—to God to preserve us through this awful night, for with it I think our troubles are over."

And James Danton knelt beside his sweetheart and prayed most fervently.

Meanwhile Death was busy in that station; the lights were put out, yet the shots came fast and furious through the darkness as the avengers and the trapped bushrangers fired at random, while each party

waited for the late moon to rise, so as to see each other better; they, the bushrangers, were environed on all sides, and by a strong party.

As Derrick Wild sprang on his mare, a sharp-pointed spear flew from under the verandah, and struck his horse in the flank; the noble beast jumped forward madly, and with a rush cleared the environing host, and darted away at full speed, then Worrogonga came from the shade and muttered:

"He no go very far, that devil horse; that Karbarda bite soon settle him quash."

It was utter darkness, and the mare bounded on, maddened with the spear still sticking in her flank, and her master using the spurs for the first time. With a snort of indignation she made a bound, after taking a hundred yards clear of the station, then she fell forward like a stone shot from a catapult, flinging her master full on his head ten feet away.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### HIS LAST BREAKFAST AND LONG RIDE.

"WHAT time does that blooming parson come, warder?"

"It is twenty past five o'clock now. He'll be here at half-past."

"Then I have just time to fill out the last page of my recipe book," said Derrick Wild cheerily, as he sprang from the mattress, and sat down to the little table to write. "That stove is just right, warder. Keep it like that till I am ready, like a good chap, and I'll cook you a breakfast that will make you

remember it and Derrick Wild, the bloody bushranger, for some weeks after he has done his final fling."

Saying which, he opened his little pocket note-book, and for the next ten minutes wrote carefully and neatly, casting up his eyes occasionally like a poet at his work, as he paused to think out a word or a harmonious condiment.

"What a man that is," murmured the warder to himself, as he stirred the stove carefully and replenished it with fresh blocks, after an admiring glance at the engrossed prisoner. "Bloody as they make 'em, yet as game as a nero (he meant hero). Never a groan over what he lost hisself, except for his poor horse and his mates, but always chirpy when awake, and, my mate says, sleeps like an innocent baby all through the night, while as for cooking, he is a master—my word!"

It was the condemned cell at Perth, and nearly half-past five o'clock on the morning of Wild's execution, that is, nearly two months since his beloved mare, Sally, fell dead and left him senseless in the Jarrah Bush, and where his pursuers found him and ignominiously captured him.

Most of the other bushrangers had died fighting; only three had been taken alive besides him, and they were now being doctored up in the hospital, so that they might be well enough for hanging. Why civilized people take such tender care of a prisoner, to have the pleasure of hanging him, is one of the many curious mysteries of law-abiding Christianity.

Helen's messenger was met half-way down by a strong party of police, who had received the hint about Wild from other quarters, so that they, with her

father, and his friends, arrived at Turro-side about three hours after the departure of the bushrangers, where they found Worrogonga with his deaf-adder poisoned spears, ready to lead them on the track of the criminals.

Her Majesty's war-sloop at once went on the search for the schooner, and caught it up before it reached Shark's Bay, in good time to secure the gold and ticket-of-leave crew, but not in time to save the lives of the foolish young blades who had sailed as passengers, and whose untimely taking off the colony had to mourn.

Rory Murdoch and his lot were tracked down and shot on the coast within sight of the sun-lit ocean which they trusted would have borne them on to liberty. Australia, as Darwin says, "is a rising child, and some day will reign a great princess in the south." It may be "too great and ambitious for affection, yet not great enough for respect, but it is a mighty difficult country to get away from," and there are many, besides Darwin, who would like to leave its shores without sorrow or regret—if they could.

Helen Craven and her lawless lover kept inside that bedroom during the shooting, and on their knees a good part of the time, and when it was all over, and day came, they were rescued and carried back in triumph to Turro-side, much the better and happier for their forced ride.

The condemned bushranger, who had only three and a half more hours to live, was still busy at his last recipe when the prison door opened, and the chaplain came in, with a grave and sorrowful countenance.

"My young friend——" he began, when Wild stopped him.

"Excuse me for one moment longer, your reverence, I am just finishing, and will listen to you presently." Then he bent over his task, oblivious to all about him.

The chaplain laid down his hat and stick on the mattress and sighed heavily as he produced his bible and church service, and sat down beside his hat. When a man is about to expiate his faults, even clergymen have to obey him as far as they can without compromising their dignity.

"Obdurate still, I fear," murmured this good man as he cast his eyes round the narrow limits of the condemned cell. There was not much in it, only the narrow bed, that small table and one chair, besides the stove, a few pots and dishes which the governor had permitted the prisoner to have during those last days, and with which he had amused himself, and won the hearts of his jailors by making them toothsome dishes.

He finished the writing of his little book, and then turning to the blank page at the front, he wrote, "Bequeathed and dedicated by Derrick Wild, gastronomic artist and bushranger, to Miss Helen Craven, of Turro-side, with the author's best wishes for her future happiness."

"There!" said the author with enthusiasm, as he sprang lightly up, and held the little book in his outstretched hand. "My earthly task is now finished, and here is a work which will bring true happiness into thousands of homes when it is published, for it is written with an honest purpose, which will make it a unique cook's friend."

"This is vanity, my poor young friend," began the clergyman, when again Wild interrupted him.

"No, sir, it is a condonation and reparation for my less worthy actions; it is the best part of myself. I have killed a few men in my time, but this will save the lives of hundreds of married men, who are now being slowly but with tortures murdered by their well-meaning but intensely ignorant wives, and that is not what I call vanity. But there, it does not become me to boast of my gifts, and before you begin to preach, I want to ask you a favour, and then I will listen to you."

"I will grant it if I can."

"Then take this book and give it to Squatter Craven's daughter as my last gift; she is not selfish, therefore I know she will get it published. The copyright I also bequeath to her, as you will see in the dedication—you will do that for me?"

"With pleasure."

"Good; now do your duty as quickly as possible, for I have promised the warder there to give him and myself a light breakfast. It has taken me some time to think out the proper breakfast for a morning like this; and now that I have decided, I want to have time to do it justice, and get into a happy condition for the exercise before me at nine o'clock."

He spoke calmly and lightly, as he fixed his black eyes somewhat mockingly on the face of the chaplain.

"My poor friend, have you no regret for what you have done, no thought about where you are going so very shortly, the consolations of religion, the

great goodness, mercy and love of your offended Maker——?"

"Bah! I am to be hanged at nine o'clock, and that will satisfy the law, and after I am jerked off, if there is a God, with a heaven and hell, it doesn't much matter which place I get to, as I shall find lots of my victims in both, I daresay, whom I shall have to face up. As for regrets, of course, if I had not that coming breakfast to think about, I should regret many things—the failure of my plans for getting away, the loss of all that gold which I stole, the death of my mates, the leaving of this world, the cutting short of my talents—by Jove, the colony could get lots more to take your post, if they hanged you, parson, instead of me; that is a crass piece of stupidity for the world to regret as well as myself, but what's the use when the thing is settled?"

"Have you no other regret or sorrow, young man?"

"Yes, I have a real regret, a real sorrow; yet a great cause to be grateful to my Maker," answered Wild, for the first time with some show of emotion on his swarthy face. "When they told me that Worrogonga, the native, whom I spared, had murdered my bonnie mare, then I did regret that I had not killed him with his tribe; and I have sorrowed often during these two months, that I could not have a last look and kiss at my darling Sally—but no matter, if men have souls, so had that mare, and she will wait for me, when Jack Ketch has finished his job, and then—yo, ho! we'll have a proper gallop through the gullies of Hades."

"Horrible, horrible!" gasped the clergyman.

"To you, holy man, with life before you, perhaps, yes. To me, already doomed, a thing to look forward with eagerness for—enough almost to banish revenge and—*regret.* Now, what I am grateful for, and what makes me almost a believer in the goodness of God, is the exquisite palate He has endowed me with, and which can make me cry after I have taken this last breakfast:—'Oh, death, where is thy sting, oh! grave, where is thy victory?' You see I can quote Scripture like my master sometimes, but all the same I am very grateful for the pleasures which my Maker has given me. Ha! ha! best give the like of me up, for I have the soul of a pagan, and I must go to my own place. You will find much more benefit in staying with me and helping me to eat my breakfast than trying to save my soul—will you be my guest and give me one last pleasure on earth?"

"I shall stay with you and pray for you to the last," answered the chaplain sorrowfully.

"Yes, do; you pray while I cook, only if you don't want me to blaspheme at your prayers, pray softly so as not to distract me while I work, for I want everything to be perfect this blessed morning. Now, warder, let us set to work."

He went over to the stove and began, while the jailor, who had received seven days' training, waited upon him respectfully and watched his movements closely as the chaplain kneeled down by the bed and prayed fervently yet without much hope.

It was an impressive scene; this handsome but doomed criminal, intent only on his dishes, the clergyman pouring out supplications to which no one listened, and that admiring guard sniffing up the

pleasant fumes and forgetting that his duty was to look after the prisoner and not the pots. By seven o'clock the breakfast was ready, and the door again opened, and an attendant brought in a table-cloth and a bottle of wine, with one cigar in a glass—these had been ordered by the prisoner over-night.

"Parson," said the doomed man earnestly, "you will honour me on this morning by tasting my sauce, for it is perfection. I call it '*Ketch-up* sauce,' to commemorate the occasion, and the salad I do not think can be surpassed, as you will say if you try it. You see, I have pondered a good deal over this morning's proceedings as is but natural for a man to do in my position, and at last I decided that a plump, tender chicken with this peculiar sauce, and salad, and stuffing, and a glass of Chablis, is the most suitable breakfast I can take, where the after-pleasures are so limited—let me help you to a wing and a slice of the breast, and, warder, ask them to bring in two more glasses."

It was hard to refuse the request of a man about to die, particularly such a request with this appetizing odour filling the cell, and therefore after a moment of hesitation while he considered the dignity of his sacred office, the chaplain succumbed, and before many moments had reason to regret the necessity of cutting short the life of such a gifted young man.

"You see, your reverence, such a breakfast as this is will leave no dark thoughts, or heaviness of spirits behind it; after this cigar, I shall be able to meet the executioner in a benevolent and easy frame of mind, greet the daylight and fresh air with an appreciative spirit during my exceedingly short promenade, listen to your supplications in my behalf with a tender and

grateful attention, and face the long drop with a delicate relish and flavour in my gullet."

"I am thankful to hear you say so; very thankful indeed, for repentance, although tardy, is——"

"Pardon me, I am not a bit repentant. I have had too good a breakfast for such a miserable state of indigestion; only coarse criminals, who indulge in ham and eggs or beef-steak on their last morning play that penitent thief game, for they are suffering pangs in their stomachs, which they think are the prickings of conscience. No, chaplain, I am happy, for my internal organs are working harmoniously; I am benevolent, and forgive all my persecutors at this moment. I am grateful to God for His precious gifts—indeed, I should enjoy listening to a prayer on my behalf, if you will be so kind—and all this reformation is owing to my skill in selecting what we have just discussed together, with this good cigar of the late lamented Percy Shafton."

Was he reformed? The chaplain was somewhat doubtful about it, yet, being in a happy state of mind himself, he gave this fascinating criminal the benefit of the doubt, and straightway began his exhortation to which Wild listened with most exemplary attention, puffing, meanwhile, very leisurely at his cigar.

At a quarter to nine the executioner entered with the governor and other assistants, and completed the prisoner's last toilet. Then, while the prison bell began to toll, they all went out—the prisoner the calmest of the company.

As they entered the yard, he looked up at the sky and said, "What a delicious day it is for a ride, to be sure," then seeing in the little garden a violet growing

at his feet, he stooped and plucked it, for they had not pinioned him yet, and lifting it to his nose, he smelt it tenderly, putting the stalk between his lips, after saying :

"The aroma of this violet just suits the bouquet of the Chablis. Chaplain, take my advice, if ever you come to be hanged, take chicken, salad and Chablis as your last breakfast. I don't expect, however, that you will be able to manufacture such a sauce as I gave you to-day."

He was so calm and easy that a shiver ran, like a galvanic shock, through his audience, so that one young attendant fainted right off, on seeing which Wild said :

"Poor devil ! one would think it was his turn instead of mine."

With these words, he sprang up the steps of the scaffold, and when he had taken his stand on the trap-door, he cried imperiously :

"Quick, Jack Ketch, with your part of the performance, for my breakfast is digested now, and I am longing to see my bonnie mare Sally."

These were the last words of Derrick Wild. Next moment, the bolt shot back, and he had begun his eternal gallop.

---

## ENVOI.

### TWELVE MONTHS AFTER.

"My darling Helen ! "

"No—no, Mr. James Danton, this was all very well when you were in danger of your life and an outlaw, but now that you have become a respectable member

of society, with a good income from your mother, and that gold and opal cave of yours, the case is decidedly altered. I must be courted all over again from the very beginning, before I know whether I like you well enough to marry you. You see, you have been away so long, and I have had time to reflect; besides, I am such a splendid cook now, that with all the romance worn out, it has to be carefully considered."

The scene was that little gully in front of the cavern; the persons I do not mean to describe. Worrogonga was, at present, inside the cave, looking after their horses.

"Well, Miss Craven, it is rather hard on a poor fellow like me to say all I should like to say to such a wealthy heiress as you have become, for what are my little gold mine and few hundreds compared to your expectations, and who could have expected your mother to turn out the next-of-kin to the Hon. Percy Shafton? Really, I feel now worse than the impostor I was before."

"Don't, Jamie, say that, for it hurts me. You know how precious you are to me, and I only want to be quite sure I am the same to you."

"You know it, do you not?"

"Ah, you exasperating and most unromantic gold-finder, kiss me, if you can say nothing nicer than that."

Worrogonga, inside the cave, heard some sounds which made him wink at the horses, and say to them, "Bully times outside, you bet."

"And you will never get tired of me, or cast up my forwardness, Jamie?"

"I can never cease to worship you as my salvation, my Queen."

"And uncle Timothy as our King?"

"Yes, Helen; whatever and whoever you please to set over me."

"Then, Jamie, I'll excuse the courting over again, and I think I shall be able to make you happy, thanks to Derrick Wild's gift."

"It is a wonderful book altogether, and I hear that it is selling like a newspaper in the towns."

"Yes; he was a great fellow, whom I must for ever feel grateful to, for making an honest man out of my Lawless Lover."

THE END

Stirling, July 1896.

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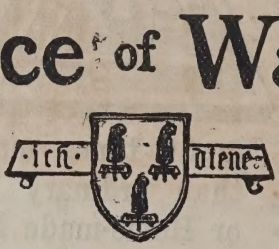

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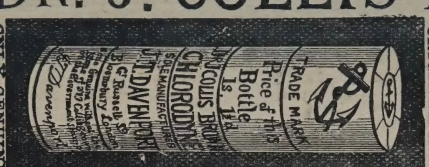


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